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Whitelaw;

OR,

NATTIE OF THE LAKE SHORE.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF "PATHWAY," "NICK WHIFFLES,"
"NIGHTSHADE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE HUT IN THE WOODS.

A YOUNG man, with a leathern wallet slung under his left arm by a strap passing over his shoulder, was threading his way through an extensive forest, which, at that time, belted the eastern shore of Lake Superior. The night was intensely dark. The elements were convulsed by a violent storm, accompanied with thunder and lightning. The wind roared menacingly through the trees, bending their sturdy branches like reeds, making sullen music to the murmur of the rain.

The solitary pedestrian was doing his best to follow a small foot-path which wound eccentrically through the woods, leading he knew not whither. He would have lost his thread-like guide entirely, had it not been for the red electric glare, which, every few moments, made the forest seem in a blaze. At intervals, when the storm lulled, he could hear the tumbling and tossing of the waters of the lake, as the billows were flung madly against the shore. More than once the bewildered young man paused and mentally debated whether he should not cast himself beneath a patriarchal tree, and be content with its shelter till the friendly morning light came to guide his footsteps. While this thought was passing through his mind, a tall pine was stricken by a blinding and terribly-brilliant discharge from the heavens, and shivered from branch to root in the twinkling of an eye: it went down with a crash, and a shower of rifted splinters fell around the young man, who was thrown upon the ground by the concussion. He arose, considerably confused, and hurried on.

He had groped his way perhaps half a mile further, still guided by the incessant flashes, when, to his joy, he discovered a faint and glimmering light, stationary and quite different from the electric gleams that had thus far befriended him. He soon found himself at the door of a miner's hut. He did not stop to question re-

specting the reception he might receive, but knocked with a firm and confident hand; but when the door was opened, slowly and reluctantly, and he saw the face that looked out upon him, he was half inclined to think that a shelterless and tempestuous night was better than the hospitality of the hut.

"What do you want?"

The young man recoiled involuntarily at the sound of the voice, and from the expression of that unsympathizing visage. What a question to put to a drenched and lost traveler! There was a horrible crash of thunder.

"Shelter and food," answered the applicant, recovering his self-possession.

"You can come in," said he, ungraciously.



LASHED TO A LOG.

The young man crossed the threshold. The miner—such he knew him to be at the first glance—pointed sulkily to a seat near a blazing fire.

"A gruff host!" thought the young man, as he unslung his wallet and placed it beside him. Holding his chilled hands to the bright flame, he looked around to see upon what companionship he had fallen. There were three persons besides the man who admitted him, all miners, and as ill-looking fellows as ever wielded a pick or cut-

a purse or a throat. He noticed that they eyed him sharply as he entered, and while he was seating himself, put their heads together and whispered. This he did not like, although he confessed there might be no harm in it. He perceived that the hut was divided into two compartments. He saw a dim light streaming under the door of the other and evidently smaller room, and once or twice thought he heard a light step within it. Curiosity, and something more, was aroused in the young man's mind.

"What's your name?" asked the man who had admitted him.

"Ross," replied he of the wallet.

"Have you been near Copper Creek, to-day?"

Ross looked steadily at the questioner. The tones did not please him, neither did the expression of his dogged features. He answered the question in the affirmative.

"Hunting for gold, eh?"

"I was doing a little in that way, I confess; and thus far, it has proved time poorly spent. Your countenance looks a little familiar. What name may I call you?"

"Ralph Quimby," replied the miner, with evident hesitation.

There was an awkward pause.

"I want to speak to you, Nat Stratton," said Quimby, presently, addressing one of the men. "We left that deer where the wolves'll carry it off, we must put the carcass where it'll be safe, for it's an uncommon fat fellow."

Quimby and Stratton went out, and the other two soon followed, although the storm had not in the least abated. This circumstance struck Ross as being singular, if not suspicious. While he was reflecting upon it, the door of the other room was softly opened, and he beheld an object that surprised him more than all the incidents of the night—a face and a form that he believed he could never, never forget. A vision of surpassing loveliness was presented to his wondering eyes. A young girl stood looking at him with an expression of mingled earnestness, terror, and timidity, that was both striking and startling. Her beauty beamed upon him

like the sun from a cloud. He involuntarily arose from his seat, but admiration and astonishment kept him mute.

"Be silent!" she said. Her voice was melodious. "Leave the hut, if you can; if you cannot, do not sleep to-night."

"What do you mean?" gasped Ross.

"You can go now; there is time. Rush out and save yourself in the darkness."

She glided to the door so lightly, that her feet

seemed scarcely to press the floor. She listened, and when next she looked at Ross, her fair face was the picture of dismay and distress.

"You cannot go; they have fastened the door outside. I can hear the murmur of their voices, too."

She clasped her hands hopelessly. There was the rustle of a footstep at the door.

"Lost! lost! Have you arms?" whispered the girl, with trembling eagerness.

Ross threw back the breast of his coat, and showed the handle of a revolver. There was a bed in the room. After a painful pause of irresolution and doubt, the girl directed her finger toward it. He hurriedly approached it, raised the covering which hung to the floor, looked under, saw the body of a man, motionless, with blood spots upon his garments. A natural feeling of awe crept through his nerves. He remained an instant, holding the quilt, with his eyes fastened upon the ghastly object. He turned to question the fair young creature who had made this revelation; she had disappeared, and he heard hands undoing the outer door. He sprang back to his seat by the fire, and had scarcely composed himself to an indifferent attitude, when Quimby and his companions returned.

Bernard Ross was brave and inured to adventure. He had traveled in the West, and been brought into contact with all descriptions of people. The vicissitudes of the backwoods, the dangers of the border, and the contingencies of a wandering life, were not unknown to him. But, notwithstanding this, he would have given all he possessed to have been out in the storm and darkness, in the dreariest recesses of the Ten Miles Trace.

He feigned to be absorbed in drying his drenched clothes, but did not fail to observe the countenances of the miners attentively, well persuaded that he could read a wicked purpose in each. They belonged to a class that is seldom found, save on the outer circle of civilization. They were characters who preferred to flit on the border, where law is lax and justice slow-footed.

What cast this young and beautiful girl into such society?

The question perplexed Bernard Ross beyond measure. But that was not the point to be now decided, it was the thrilling matter of life and death. Ralph Quimby began to talk. He brought a glass of spirit from a rough closet, and offered it to Bernard, who courteously, but firmly refused it. This rejection of hospitality was not well received. Quimby frowned, and threw the spirit upon the stone-hearth, with a sneer.

"Does the storm abate any?" asked Ross.

A crash that shook the hut as if it were an egg-shell, answered the question with sufficient clearness. The elemental battle was indeed terrific. The heavens seemed about to fall and annihilate all below. A thousand flames of sheeted fire, darting and leaping in every direction, lighted up the forest with a horrible glare. Even the miners started to their feet in awe; then, as if ashamed of their weakness, settled back again with a defiant laugh or muttered exclamation.

"I'm sorry for this," said Bernard, presently. "I hoped to be far from here before midnight."

He pretended to be looking at the fire, but was covertly watching Ralph, whose eyes met those of Nat Stratton with a meaning look.

"What have you got in your wallet, stranger?" asked the latter.

"A few specimens of ore, which I will show you in the morning," answered the young man.

Quimby and Stratton nodded at each other.

"I think you must be tired, young man," said the former, "so you can just throw yourself on that bed, and sleep till this infernal racket is over. Border-men, like us, can rest as well on a floor as you inland people on a bed."

The young man's thoughts flowed quickly. In a moment he made up his mind what to do. He took up his wallet, yawned, and replied:

"It's too good an offer to reject. An hour or two's sleep will do me no harm." He advanced to the bed, and saw the tip of a bloodless finger protruding, and seeming to point at the miners, from beneath the trailing drapery. He placed the wallet on the floor at the head of the bed, and lay down in his clothes, on his right side, with his face to the fire. His eyes nearly closed, his right arm across his breast, so as to bring his hand near the pocket containing his revolver, it was now his business to watch these men, to note their slightest movement, and to defend himself as best he could against a sudden attack. He realized the precariousness,

not to say horror of his position. He read assassin in each of those sun-browned, stolid faces. He perceived that they were actuated by a strong motive. Why had they asked him if he had been to Copper Creek? Did they regard him in the light of an interloper, and an infringer upon their rights? An intuitive flash streamed across his mind: perhaps these were the men who held the "gold-secret" of which he had heard, and were disposed to consider him a spy upon their actions, coming there for the sole purpose of ferreting out their important discovery. Certain bags of gold, it had been rumored, had been offered for exchange at some of the nearest border settlements. In truth, there was little or no doubt that such had been the case, and this fact had influenced the movements of Bernard Ross more than he would have been willing to acknowledge.

These, perhaps, were the lawless men that held that terrible Shibboleth! A sickly sensation of despair fell upon the young man. To add to the silent terror of his situation, came the dread consciousness of that which was sleeping the last untroubled, eternal sleep beneath him. He recalled the still, rigid lineaments of the blood-smutched face—the outstretched, nerveless proportions which, questionless, had been tenderly cherished by a mother, perhaps dearly loved by a sister, sweetheart, or wife. Intimately connected with these startling realities, was the beautiful girl, separated from him by a thin partition only. He was sure that he had her sympathy, whoever she was, or whatever strange linking together of circumstances brought her there. He knew that she was trembling, fluttering, fearing, agitated, despairing, for him; and it was some consolation to feel, that if he died a violent death, there was one pure feminine soul who would know it, and possibly shed tears over the catastrophe.

The storm held its breath a little; it moderated its fury; the thunder rolled with a hollow, solemn murmur in the distance. Ralph Quimby made a motion to Stratton—an affirmative motion with his head. The fire was burning low; the brands fell back upon the stone hearth, and their charred ends pointed up the wide flue of the chimney. Waves of light and darkness fluctuated through the miner's hut. Stratton slowly raised his burly figure erect. His darkly-lined face turned upon Bernard Ross with a steady, inquisitive gaze. There was a ponderous stone hammer in a corner of the hut. Stratton glanced at it, then at the apparent sleeper. Bernard saw him steal toward the implement, grasp it by the handle, hesitate, then approach the bed.

The young man's heart beat fast; the crisis was at hand.

The ruffian drew nearer and nearer; he stood, at length, beside the bed; he upheaved the miner's hammer—it was descending with terrible force. Bernard sprang back; the blow fell on the meagre pillow. He drew his revolver; he fired. The man dropped the sledge and fell backward upon the floor.

These last decisive movements passed rapidly. The miners simultaneously leaped to their feet. Quimby drew a pistol, and the other two, knives. There was a moment of astonishment and indecision on the part of the ruffians. Ross sat upright in the bed, with his revolver pointed. A ball from Quimby's weapon grazed his shoulder. While the smoke curled through the room, the apparently dead man seemed galvanized into life, started up from beneath the bed, and caught the sledge that had fallen from Stratton's hands. The wildness of his appearance, his haggard eyes, his ghastly face streaked with blood, made the assassins recoil.

The door of the other room was at that instant thrown open, and the beautiful girl that Bernard had seen, sprang in with a deprecating cry, and stood with uplifted hands between him and the miners.

CHAPTER II.

NATHALIA.

Ralph Quimby was the first to act; he seized a pail of water, and dashed it upon the fire. The hut became totally dark; not an object was visible.

"Back to your room, girl! back to your room! There's to be a fight here, and you'll be likely to get a pistol-shot or the thrust of a knife. You, Jack Brower, and you, Joe Sturgis, take care of yourselves, and show the eaves-dropping, spying rascals, how we do things on the lake shore. Down with 'em, I say—down with 'em!"

The sound of Ralph's voice told Ross in what

direction to fire, but he dared not discharge his revolver for fear of wounding her who stood between. He slipped from the bed, but not so softly that the movement did not make some noise. He listened to hear the respiration of the man with the hammer. Not hearing him, he put out his hand to touch him; the place where he had stood was vacant. Just then he saw something gleaming over his head that had the glitter of steel. He sprang aside and heard a bowie-knife cutting the air. He now moved with more caution, and stooping and groping, brushed the garments of the girl, who had remained silent from terror. Fear for her absorbed all personal apprehensions. He caught her in his arms, and remembering the position of the door, bore her into the room from whence she came.

A flash of lightning revealed a bed, upon which he placed his nearly unconscious burden. The transient electric reflection afforded him, also, a passing glimpse of her face; it was white as a lily, and indescribably lovely. The thought of danger and death did not repress what was manly in his nature, and a deep, involuntary feeling of admiration for the girl of the "Ten Mile Trace" possessed him, even at that critical moment.

A thrilling silence, meanwhile, prevailed in the room where the nocturnal, sanguinary drama was being enacted. Ross felt that his duty was there, to defend and avenge his new ally, who had entered so unexpectedly and boldly into the strife. He was crossing the threshold on his hands and knees, when he came in collision with some one in the same position. They sprang at each other like tigers. Great, strong arms grasped Bernard, and he and his unknown antagonist rolled on the floor, in a deadly and mutual struggle for the mastery. Several times the ruffian tried to hold the young man beneath him with one hand and the weight of his body, while with his disengaged arm he should dispatch him with his knife, the back of which he held firmly in his teeth at the instant of grappling, but which, during their rough-and-tumble evolutions, had fallen upon the floor. Both were forced to rely on mere physical power and endurance.

While each was thus tugging and straining at the other, a scuffle commenced in the other room, attended with frequent and heavy falls and muttered curses. Ross thought of his new and half-murdered friend, and a strong desire for his safety endowed him with surprising strength. He wrenched his right hand free, and fixed his fingers like the claws of a catamount on the throat of the muscular ruffian. He threw his whole soul into the effort, and felt the flesh, and muscles, and vessels, yielding like paper to his grip. The fellow uttered a cry of pain, relaxed his hold, rolled from Bernard, vainly trying to break from that clutch of despair.

Bernard heard the girl spring from the bed and to the open door; then her clear voice rang out warningly; it was like an angel rebuking demons.

"Forbear, Ralph Quimby—forbear! This can no longer be. Cease this horrid strife, or I'll proclaim your secret to all the world! Secret, did I say? I will reveal more than one. I will give you to the hand of Justice!"

"Silence! Are you mad?" shrieked Ralph. "Keep still, or by —, I'll quiet ye forever!"

The struggle went on in the room where the three men were. Bernard, who still held his conquered adversary, caught the stealthy sound of a coming foot, and raising his antagonist, threw him heavily upon the floor. A shriek from the girl made him hasten to her assistance; she was writhing in the rough grasp of Quimby.

"Betray me, will you?" he yelled. "Give me to the law, won't ye?"

That harsh voice directed Bernard. His left hand was on the man's shoulder in an instant. Seizing his revolver, which he had thrust into his pocket before bearing the girl from the immediate scene of danger, he struck him upon the head with its heavy butt; his legs sank under him, and he fell like a dead man. Bernard placed his foot remorselessly on his massive chest, and threw his weight upon it, standing thus a moment to discover if there was life enough in him to arise; but the great lump of flesh quivered helplessly. The victor's blood stirred with joy. He experienced a fierce, stern pleasure in treading upon the brutal being; it seemed like justice, retribution, compensation. And what added to his exultation and satisfaction, was the fact that his arm encircled the waist of the beautiful girl.

The struggle that had been going on among

the blocks, benches, and various belongings of the hut, stopped, and nothing reached the ears of Bernard save a faint and gasping sound of respiration, and that presently ceased.

Imagine such a situation: a vast wood on the borders of civilization; a night black and tempestuous; solemn thunder rumbling afar off, and white sheets of lightning illuminating at intervals the sombreness of the sky and the murky depths of the forest; a hut built of timber, the roof covered with the rift of the pine, the boughs of the cedar and hemlock; two small compartments within; a primitive chimney at one side, built of stones and sticks; darkness pervading all; men actuated by sordid, brutal passions, waging deadly hostility against two fellow-travelers upon the same tortuous road of life. Picture the horror of the positions—the uncertainty that prevailed—the thrilling circumstances that surrounded Bernard Ross and the fair creature beside him. Consider that love had sprang into existence with his peril—been born within the very jaws of death.

The light form hung heavily on his arm. Her helplessness, her dependence on him, gave both strength and daring. He listened. Why was it so wonderfully still? Were they all dead? Had they tugged out each others' lives in the darkness? No; the man he had throttled began to move; he gasped in the pangs of returning life. The form beneath his foot stirred; a great tremor went over it, and Ralph Quimby sprang to his feet, as if moved by automatic machinery.

The silence was disturbed by a sharp and authoritative knocking. Bernard heard it with joy.

"Come in!" he cried, still sustaining the trembling form of the girl.

Immediately, an effort was made to open the door, and a gruff voice answered:

"Better unfasten the door, mister! This old boss don't keer to be fooled such a night's this. 'Tisn't comfortable bein' out when you can't see your hind sights, and it's so wet you can't keep your powder dry. Make haste, I say, or down goes your door!"

"If you are a good man and true, you can't come in too soon; so down with the door, as speedily as you please," replied Ross.

Suddenly inspired with strength, the girl darted from Bernard noiselessly through the darkness, and instantly he heard the bolt of the door pushed back.

"Well, here's a crow's nest!" said the person who had just spoken. "Candles are mighty scarce this way, I reckon. Better strike a light, some of ye!"

"Nathalia—Nattie! Mind what you do!" exclaimed Ralph Quimby, rallying his scattered faculties. "We don't want no light here. Go away! The storm is nearly over, and I don't care to be disturbed in my own hut at this time of night."

"What kind of a niggur do you call yourself, boss? Blackfoot or Rapaho, a'n't ye? Never been up in the mountains, I take it. We don't give folks the cold shoulder thereaway, long's we have a blanket to spare. We give sich as we has, and makes the lost and starvin' trapper comfortable as possible. Wah! Hullo, gal? that's it. We want somethin' o' that natur' as much as ever wet and hungry critters did."

The girl whom Quimby had called Nathalia, had produced a light, which circumstance had drawn the last remark from him of the gruff voice. The struggling rays of the lamp revealed the person of the latter standing near the door, while just behind him, on the threshold, were two other figures, one being that of a man well matured, the other of a youth of seventeen or eighteen.

The scene that presented was of a character so strange and startling, that no one spoke for a moment. On the floor, a few paces from the foremost of the unexpected party, lay the miner, the half-murdered man who had so suddenly returned to life and seized the hammer that had fallen from the hands of Stratton. These two had contended till they fell into a swoon, from sheer exhaustion and loss of blood. Their fingers still grasped each other. Looking at them from a short distance, one could not determine whether they were dead or alive. About three feet from them, face upward, his head toward the hearth and his feet to the bed, was stretched the form of Nat Stratton, giving no indications of life. There was a little pool of blood under his neck.

Ralph Quimby was standing on the stone-hearth beside the extinguished brands, his arms folded upon his chest, and his scowling

brows and gray eyes bent on the new-comers. Bernard Ross and Nathalia formed the background of this extraordinary picture.

"Who are you?" demanded Quimby, fiercely, of the man in the foreground.

"I'm a catawampious catamount! I'm a tough old hoss from the mountains! I'm the devil and all! I'm Satan let loose for a season. I'm Kid Kerly. Wah!"

"Do you want anything of me?" asked Ralph. "Nothin' special. As for looks, I ha'n't no great likin' for ye; and as for eatin', a buffler's rib would go better, any day. Wah!"

The man behind Kid Kerly now advanced. Although thick masses of grayish hair fell upon his face and neck, his form was straight and unbent, his features but lightly written over with the lines of Time. His eyes were dark, set deeply beneath an expansive forehead, and uncommonly brilliant. He was coarsely and even poorly clad. A brownish blouse, encircled at the waist by a leathern strap, reached nearly to the knee. He wore heavy top-boots, under which his trowsers were tucked. His head was covered by a low, broad-brimmed, soft hat of felt, storm-beaten and abraded by much use. He was apparently unarmed; while the burly mountain-man beside him carried a rifle, greasy and black, and the youth a weapon of the same kind, though of lighter make.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, sternly. "What evil passions have been at work?"

He pointed at the prostrate forms. "I am not accountable to you, sir!" answered Ralph Quimby. "I've a right to defend myself in my own hut, when beset by sneaks, and spies, and robbers."

"It's an evil trade, Ralph Quimby, that brings you to deeds like these," returned the other.

"Sir!"

"Call me *Whitelaw*!" he said, sharply. "Whitelaw, or madman, or Hermit of the Lake Shore, I care not which!" sneered Quimby. "Keep out of my way; that's all."

"No threats, mister!" interposed he of the gruff voice. "I've eat tougher bull-meat nor you be, when put to 't by hunger. Wah!"

"Young man," added Whitelaw, fixing his keen eyes upon Ross, "can you explain this strange scene?"

"He can—he can!" cried Nathalia, making a step toward the questioner.

The attention of the latter was instantly drawn to the young girl. He was sensibly affected by her presence; her youth and beauty, doubtless, touched his heart. He contemplated her steadily.

"Nattie, Nattie, beware!" admonished Quimby, with a menacing glance at Nathalia.

At that moment the youth moved forward, and stood between Whitelaw and the maiden; the light she held in her hand fell on him with its pale and fitful rays. His features were singularly handsome, his eyes full of wild melancholy, his mouth small and feminine. His hair hung like elf-locks over his forehead and cheeks, quite down to his shoulders. It was unkempt, straight, black, glossy. His garments were simple and poor enough; an old frock, torn in innumerable places, hung loosely about his slight figure. Upon his feet were Indian moccasins, his lower limbs being encased in trowsers of doubtful fabric, so long had they clung to the lad in his wanderings to and fro. His head was crowned with a cloth cap, fantastically ornamented with feathers of the wild turkey. A heavy coil of evergreen encircled his waist and passed up over his left shoulder. The appearance of the youth was certainly fantastic. He began to speak. His voice was soft and monotonous, his sentences hurried, and sometimes disconnected.

"It isn't a new face," he said. "I've seen it again and again—in the air, in the stars, in the moon, and all about. Ha, ha! She don't live in one place; sometimes she paddles on the water, in a white canoe, and sometimes she wanders on the lake-shore. Owen knows her—Owen has followed her. Ha, ha! Owen and his devil!"

The lad stopped and looked wildly at the motionless body of Stratton.

"The thunder thunders, and the lightning lightens," he added, "and the killers kill! I wonder who killed these? Did you kill them, pretty one?"

"Come away, Owen. Stand back, lad," said Whitelaw, gently.

"Fasten that door," said Bernard. "Let no one escape. This villain" (turning to Quimby) "must have his deserts. There has been a foul attempt at crime, if it has not actually been

committed. Ralph Quimby, give up your arms. Cast that knife upon the floor, and deliver to any of these parties the pistol in your pocket."

"He who gets my knife will get only its blade!" growled Quimby. "Who dares to take it?"

"I dare!" cried Kid Kerly. "If asked to do it, I'll take not only your weepers, but your skulp. There's a heap o' fun in liftin' ha'r, old hoss! If you've never practised the sport, go up 'mong the red niggurs and try it. Hi-yi!"

"Is this the killer that kills?" interrupted Owen. "Is it he who has been cuttin', and thrustin', and sheddin' blood? Say the word, and I'll shoot him with my gun. Nattie, Nattie—they call you, Nattie, don't they? Shall I shoot?"

The crazy youth raised his gun, and pointed it at Quimby.

"Be quiet, Owen. Lower your rifle, lad. You are too innocent to do the work of a hangman!" interposed Whitelaw, quickly.

The boy dropped the breech of the rifle upon the floor, saying:

"Do you go out when the wind blows, Nattie? When the birds sing, are you sad? Do you like thunder? Nattie, you shall see Owen hunt the deer. Owen will tell you lots of things which nobody knows. He is not afraid of the wolf; he can track and kill the panther."

Nathalia regarded the boy with a fascinated gaze; so many changes swept over his countenance, and his eyes occasionally flashed up so wildly. Feelings of a new kind, which she could not well divine, stole upon her; she felt an interest in the mentally-bewildered youth.

Ralph Quimby suddenly darted from his corner and struck the light from Nathalia's hand, hoping to make his escape in the darkness.

"Hi-yi!" cried Kid Kerly, with the whoop of an Indian brave. And Quimby felt two hands come down upon him like lion's paws; he was lifted up and then dashed upon the floor, with a force that shook the hut.

"Thunder and lightnin'! This is almost as good as a Mexican fandango. Didn't expect I should have any comfort of my life arter I'd got down as fur as old Superior. Rattle-snakes and perairie-dogs! Begin to feel as if I should have a good time. Oh for a brush!—a rantankorous, up-and-at-it, shoot-and-cut, dodge-and-scamble, hand-to-hand skirmmage for hosses, skulps, peltries, and squaws! Wah!"

"Have you got him?" asked Whitelaw.

"As fast as a beaver in a trap! I've a notion to take out his hump rib for supper," replied Kerly, seizing Ralph by the hair, and thumping his head upon the floor.

By this time Nathalia had relighted the lamp, and Kid Kerly was discovered sitting astride of Quimby's broad shoulders.

"Take away his arms," said Bernard.

"Sartin!" responded Kerly.

And, turning the ruffian over, who was stunned and bewildered, he deprived him of his knife and pistol.

At this juncture, Brower, the man whom Bernard had half-strangled, arose to his feet, and, staggering forward, showed a purple face and bloodshot eyes. He leaned against the wall for support, and looked, with a half-conscious stare, those around him.

"Let us see what can be done for this poor fellow," said Bernard, hastening to the almost-motionless form of him who had so opportunely risen from the dead, as it were, to aid him. He raised his head upon his knee, felt his pulse and heart.

"He lives! What can be done for him? He must not die!"

"Do for him?" said Kerly, springing like a monkey from the shoulders of Quimby, and pulling a flask from his pocket. "An old pacin'-hoss from the mountains knows what to do, I allow! Bless ye, here's somethin' that'd bring a dead Digger to life; and them is the slowest and lowest of all Injuns. Why, it's the nat'ral blood of a feller bein'! I've knowed a trapper that's been without his ha'r two days, to come round by the bare smell on't, and git right up and walk, arter swallerin' less nor a quart. Clap the nozzle to his gills, and let her went."

"I'm afraid it will strangle him," said Bernard.

"It's the nat'ral elements, I tell ye! You never knowed the nat'ral elements to strangle a person, did ye? Haven't the reg'lar drinks been my *habituals* for goin' on forty year? Come now, youngster, don't go to disparage the *habituals*. I'm a patient, Christian feller critter; but there mustn't be nothin' said agin a beeverage that has stood by me when I couldn't stan' by

it. Lord, Lord, man! You work too gingerly."

Bernard had been trying, without success, to turn some of the liquid into the man's mouth. Kerly caught the flask from him, opened the stiff jaws with a jerk, and, thrusting the nozzle of the flask between his teeth, administered the remedy in no stinted dose. It went down the throat at first mechanically, then with a feeble contraction of the larynx, finally with a spasmodic gasp. The tide of life began to flow back upon the almost silent heart. A flush appeared on his cheeks, his limbs shook, and his chest stirred with the pains of resuscitation.

"Knowned the *habituals* would fetch him! He's been mighty near bein' rubbed out, though. Here's a cut on the head, a thrust in the weas-and, and a stab under the left arm," said Kerly.

The wounded man was placed on a bed—the same under which he had been thrust by the miners after the commission of the crime. He revived slowly. Excitement gave strength to Nathalia. Her nerves had been terribly tried; she trembled, but heroically aided in the restoration of the man.

While this was going on, Ralph Quimby began to bestow attention upon Nat Stratton and Sturgis, both of whom presently manifested signs of life. In this work he was unaided by his unwelcome visitors. The crazy boy, Owen, watched these proceedings with a vacant and apparently uncomprehensive expression.

"They'll wake up," he muttered, shaking his head dubiously. "They'll walk about, by and by. They're dreamin' now. We all dream sometimes; Owen dreams. There are devils here. Ha, ha! You can't see the devils, but Owen can. Owen's devil is here, too; he runs along beside him like a dog. He whispers and he talks. Yes, yes; he talks. What would you give to know what he says? Ah! he speaks of blood. He points his long finger at Ralph Quimby. Look out, Quimby! look out!"

There was a weird, unnatural light in the boy's eyes; he crouched, stole on tiptoe to Nathalia's side, laughed strangely, making warning motions to Quimby, who could not help looking at him.

"Fool!" he growled, with a scowl of deadly meaning.

"Who talks of Judge Lynch?" cried Owen, casting hurried glances around.

"No one; no one!" answered Nathalia, shuddering.

"Nattie—Nattie! Don't lie, Nattie! I heard it plain enough. It was a hissing voice. Ha, ha, ha! it was Owen's devil that spoke."

"It is prophetic!" said Whitelaw, impressively. "Judge Lynch will be here, sooner or later."

"I see him! I see him!" shrieked Owen, staring at vacancy. "His hands are full of knives and pistols. Ah! there's a rope around his neck. His arms are red with blood. He has one terrible eye in the centre of his forehead, that rolls with fury. Ho-ho! he winks at Ralph Quimby!"

There was silence in the hut. Each paused to look at Owen. His comely face was rapt, and glowing with wild fervor.

"Judge Lynch!" repeated Kid Kerly. "It's a good idea. Old hoss"—to Quimby—"what say ye to Judge Lynch?"

"I say I'll fight to the last! It shall cost you dear if you try it. I tell ye it shall! Ralph Quimby don't die easy—he don't," hissed the miner, while all the fierce and savage passions of human nature struggled within him, and shook his stalwart frame.

"No violence, I entreat! Has not blood enough been shed this night?" said Nathalia.

"There must be law everywhere," answered Whitelaw, firmly.

"There's no law here!" cried Ralph, who was growing uneasy.

"A lie to your teeth!" exclaimed Whitelaw, indignantly.

"Where?—where is it?" asked Quimby, derisively.

"In the hearts of true men!" thundered Whitelaw.

A red, awful gleam of lightning at that instant filled the heavens with flame, making the dark night brighter than day, playing with fearful intensity over every face in the hut. The lake shore seemed a furnace. There was a crash that was equal to the roar of a thousand parks of artillery. Every one in the hut was prostrated and, for a moment, bewildered. There followed a sound of falling splinters.

When Bernard recovered his self-possession, he discovered that the door was open. A great forest tree had fallen; a limb had struck the

hut in its crushing descent. Nathalia was lying insensible beside the bed. He raised her, but she gave no signs of life. No breath passed her white lips; no respiration swelled her silent bosom. A feeling of unutterable anguish and desolation came upon the young man. He held the beautiful wreck to his heart, and in that instant life seemed to have lost its charm for him.

"Dead! dead!" he exclaimed, in a voice of despair. "The fairest and the sweetest! Dead! Dead!"

CHAPTER III.

NATHALIA AND RALPH.

Bernard Ross did not entirely lose his presence of mind; he remembered that water dashed upon persons rendered insensible by lightning, was the best means of resuscitation. He looked around for some and saw the empty bucket, where Quimby had dropped it after throwing its contents upon the fire. He discovered, also, that the latter and Brower had disappeared, and he was glad to be relieved of their presence.

"Take the pail and run for water," said Bernard to Owen.

"There's plenty of it comin' down; if it wasn't for it, the sky would be on fire. Owen will go, for Nattie looks pale. You musn't let her dream a long time. Here I go! Owen's devil will tell him where to find a spring."

The youth took the bucket and left the hut.

"While you bring the gal round, Whitelaw and I'll tend to these nighabout rubbed out critters. She's a proper bit o' white clay! You might travel a week 'mong the Sioux, Crows, Snakes, Blackfeet, and Rapahos, and never come upon nothin' equal to her in the woman way."

The rain was pouring upon the roof of rift; Bernard bore Nathalia from the hut and let it fall upon her face and person. It came down in drenching quantities. Hearing a rivulet murmuring close at hand, he moved to it, and supporting her form upon one knee, dashed the reviving element upon her still inanimate person. Darkness was around him. He could see his fair patient only as the lightning flashed from from the skies, lending for a moment, by its intensity, a startling pallidness to the white lips of Nathalia. He heard some one near him, but believed it to be Whitelaw or Owen. He was too much absorbed in the girl to realize anything save her and her peril. A slight sound, he thought, escaped her lips.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured. "She will live!"

A hand was laid on his shoulder, but so pre-occupied was his mind, that the circumstance scarcely attracted his notice. An electric flash streaming through the forest, revealed to Bernard the figure of Ralph Quimby bending over him. It was but a momentary vision in which the whole personality of the man seemed painted in red flame. Bernard was kneeling upon his right knee, supporting Nathalia on the other and his left arm. Before he could disengage himself, he was prostrated by a blow, which bewildered, but did not deprive him of consciousness. He arose, reeling and confused, and heard the sounds of rapidly receding steps. He groped about for Nathalia; she was gone. It required little penetration to know what had become of her; the truth was too evident; Ralph Quimby was bearing her away. He stood there a moment, powerless to act. Who was Nathalia? Who was this man, who appeared to have the control of her person? What relationship did they sustain to each other? He was not her father, because she had called him Ralph Quimby.

These reflections went through his brain hurriedly. He preferred to think that she was kept at the hut by compulsion, rather than by choice or will of her own. He did not stop to ask if Quimby had any legal or natural authority over her, but the instant his brain recovered from the effects of the blow, followed him.

It will be perceived that Bernard Ross was in love; and persons in this condition of mind do not always calculate very definitely the chances of success in their undertakings. He dashed into the forest like a madman, in pursuit of this new and beautiful object. He ran blindly against trees; he entangled himself in thickets; he pushed his way impetuously through opposing bushes, unmindful alike of falls and the wounds inflicted by projecting limbs, against which he rushed recklessly.

Meantime Nathalia revived; probably the rapid motion assisted in her recovery. At first she had but a dreamy, vague sense of existence, but presently memory came to connect the present with the past. She felt strong, un-

gentle arms around her, and the rain pattering upon her face.

"Where am I? Whose arms are these? Release me, till I know where I am," she murmured.

"Don't trouble yourself!" said Quimby. "You're in safe hands; I'll warrant."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nathalia, shuddering.

"Don't shiver, girl. Nobody'll harm ye, if you're reasonable," replied Ralph, trying to speak kindly.

"Let me walk! If I must go with you in this dreadful darkness and storm, let me walk!" With a sudden effort, inspired by disgust and fear, she released herself from his arms.

"There—there! Do not touch me, Ralph Quimby. I choose to be no nearer to you than this."

"Call me uncle! Why don't you call me uncle?" said the miner, in a wheedling voice.

"The reason is well known to you. It is because you inspire me with terror and disgust. If my blood is akin to yours, I am sure the relationship stops there; for our souls are most dissimilar. To me, you are Ralph Quimby—a man of dark thoughts and dark deeds. Unhappy the day that gave me into your power!"

"Go on in that way!" he sneered. "You will benefit yourself by it, perhaps. You'll get better treatment for it. Beware, Nattie, beware! You're in my trap, and you can't get out. You don't know me yet; you don't understand what I'm capable of doing. There's a spice of the devil in me that you'd better not trifle with."

Ralph's voice was low and menacing. Nathalia felt her helplessness.

"Whither do you drag me?" she asked, in an agitated tone. "For what purpose am I forced to follow you?"

Her accents would have touched any heart, perhaps, but Quimby's.

"Did you think I would leave you?" he retorted, fiercely. "Did you imagine that we could part? No, no! you cannot be so weak, so senseless. Nothing but death can separate us. You have a tongue, which must and shall be silent. Some people don't know enough; others know too much. You know too much."

He paused, then added, with an impressiveness that made Nathalia tremble:

"You must know *less* or *nothing*!"

"Surely, you—you would not—"

"But I would, though; and, by —, I will! unless you will take a solemn oath of silence—such an oath as I shall dictate, the penalties of which, if broken, will consign you to eternal perdition."

There was a certain iron hardness in the man's voice that testified to the fixedness of his purpose. Nathalia knew Ralph Quimby well enough to know that he was in earnest. There was no room for doubt in her mind, respecting either his character or his resolution. She thought of the young stranger, Bernard Ross, and drew rapid comparisons between him and Ralph. She recalled innumerable memories of her past life, and wondered whether the extinction of her physical being would really be the worst thing that could happen—her life had latterly been so isolate and miserable, so persecuted, so weighed down with appalling secrets. Nathalia was innocent; the innocent have courage, which they do not know they possess till the hour of peril draws it out. Nathalia became strong—singularly, preternaturally strong in a moment. She was self-magnetized by the thought of her own helplessness. She stopped; she stood erect, her face upturned, her dark hair trailing over her shoulders, the rain beating upon her, while the thunder rumbled hoarsely overhead, rolling away in the distance like myriad chariots rapidly driven through the arch of heaven, and the oft-recurring lightning-gleams quivering over her person.

"I swear to you," cried Nathalia, with wild enthusiasm, "that I will not swear! that I will not keep your secrets! that I will keep my own soul obedient to my own will! Here I stand, Ralph Quimby; do your worst."

The miner had but small appreciation of the beautiful and the sublime in human character. His was one of those minds that does not care to look beyond the temporalities of this material life. He troubled not himself about the future. The sudden exaltation of Nathalia, instead of softening, inflamed and angered him. The haunting phantom of Justice that had pursued him long and worried his conscience, now seemed to him about to be realized through the agency of the girl, unless her silence was effectually secured. There floated before him, in

imagination, law, evidence, and the scaffold. He did not reply at once; he reflected and made up his mind before answering.

"Come along, Nattie—come along," he said, hoarsely. "I did but try you. You don't suppose I'd murder you?"

"I don't know," said Nathalia.

"Ha, ha! What a fancy!"

Ralph laughed, as if the absurdity of the idea was paramount; but that laugh struck more terror to the heart of Nathalia than threats.

"You are hard on your uncle, Nathalia. Kill you, indeed! Well, it would be pretty business, wouldn't it?"

He moved onward, and Nathalia followed reluctantly.

"Do tell me where we are going," she said.

"To a cabin not far off, Nattie. Don't be scared. Who's going to harm ye—eh? It's rough here; take hold of my arm. How it rains! haven't seen such a storm in a long time. I'll go down to Fort Brady to-morrow. Do you want to send for anything, Nathalia?"

She did not reply; she could not; there was something so unnatural in this transition. She thought of the cat that holds its trembling victim, the mouse, gingerly between its soft paws, as if afraid of injuring it. She longed for the light of morning—it was so dreadful to be with him in the darkness. She wished, too, to see that face before her, and read her fate in its expression.

"I've been stern to you sometimes, Nattie"—his voice was quite gentle, strangely gentle—"but in moments of reflection I've been sorry for it. We're all very human, Nattie. I know how you regard me. If the whole thing was written out in the Bible, I couldn't know your thoughts better. Don't shrink and tremble, child! I'm in my better mood, now. Ralph Quimby has his demon, but he has his angel, too. The worst of us has his angel, Nattie. Take my arm, niece."

Poor Nathalia, child of nature and of truth, was fairly bewildered. There was such a change in Ralph Quimby; his voice was toned down to such a softness; his manner was so humble. There could not be deceit in this. He stopped; she half mechanically moved to his side and took his arm. The voice of kindness charmed her; it was seldom that she heard it. She was not certain of it, now; but it was so like, that she was doubtful, and gave him the benefit of the doubt.

"I knew your father, Nathalia."

Did his voice grow a little harder, or was it imagination?

"Was he a good man, uncle?"

Her feminine arm pressed his a little, just to remind him that she had human affections.

"He was proud, and had a deal of book-learning; but he married—he married—"

"Whom did he marry, uncle Ralph?"

"A very beautiful girl," replied Quimby, huskily.

"Do I resemble her?" asked Nattie.

"Too much—too much! Her name was Rosalie. It's near morning, I should think—shouldn't you? Tread carefully, niece; we're near some mines, I believe. A tumble down one of them would crush one in pieces. I loved your mother, Nattie."

Nathalia suddenly drew her arm from Quimby's.

"You, sir—you?"

"Ha, ha! Is it strange that I should have a heart? Well, your father had the same feeling."

His voice was harsh, then.

"Forgive me," said Nathalia. "I meant no harm, indeed."

She took his arm again.

"I dare say not—I dare say not."

He laughed in a manner that made her regret that she was so near him. She had never seen him in such a mood before; she could not comprehend it; it was past her philosophy. Her instincts told her that little good could come out of him; but hope made her charitable.

"We're very near the mines, child; it would be a terrible thing to fall into one of them. Let us stop till a flash of lightning shows us where we are."

They stood still; but the storm was again receding, and it was some minutes before the lightning blazed upon them; when it did dart from the clouds, it revealed several shafts but a few yards from them.

"Now we can go on without fear," said Ralph.

"The cabin I spoke of is not far off."

"I shudder!" answered Nathalia. "There is a singular awe upon me."

"Your voice is like your mother's."

"You must tell me about her, some time. You seldom mention her, and you look so strangely when you do, that you terrify me. Oh! we are walking directly into the mines."

"Yes; we are quite near them."

The man paused.

"On the very brink of a shaft!" cried Nathalia, as another gleam showed her a yawning abyss at her feet.

"Do not move! Keep still! I'll feel about and find a safe way from this dangerous spot. There are traps all around us, I'm afraid. I wonder how I could lose myself among these pitfalls. Do not take a step, Nattie, to the right nor left."

Quimby disengaged her arm from his, and stood silently beside her.

"What are you doing?" said Nathalia, tremulously.

"I'm thinking," replied Quimby, "whether a secret would be safe in a copper-mine!"

A feeling of horror crept over Nathalia. Her eyes, quickened by apprehension, conquered the darkness, and saw the gaping mouth of the shaft and the face of Ralph Quimby.

"Your father," he said, huskily, "robbed me of more than life. Robbed, did I say? He stole from me my love, my wife; for which I hate him, and her, and you! I have lived for revenge. Judge Lynch nor the scaffold shall cheat me of revenge!"

All softness had gone out of that voice; it was harsh and croaking as a raven's. Nathalia did not speak; she could not. Her head swam with a dizzy sense of peril. A great dread was upon her. A silence ensued; it lasted half a minute. The thunder muttered far up among the veiled stars, and waves of white light billowed to and fro on the eastern verge of the horizon. A solemn resignation drifted through the consciousness of Nathalia.

Ralph perceived or felt her silent terror.

"Remember your words, Nattie. 'I'll betray your secret. I will give you up to the law.' Do you know, girl, that law is the most horrible word in the world? Do you know that it is the torment of my life? Do you know that I dream of it, nights? Remorseless creature! Offshoot, offspring, part, parcel of my deadly enemy! you never, never, never can understand the feelings that I feel; the tortures that torture me; the fear that makes me sleepless! But there is a terrible pleasure in this moment; it gives form and reality to the fixed purpose of many years. Cursed, cursed was he who robbed me of all that I doted on! Thou, Nathalia, art a part of him; and the devils whisper that he will suffer in thee!"

The young girl clasped her white hands, and turned her glassy eyes toward the impenetrable heavens.

"Don't fear, Nattie! don't think of evil! You are with a man whom your father stabbed to the heart. Ha, ha, ha! Good-night, Nattie—a long, dark, eternal night! I hate the human race! Good-night, Nattie! Down—down!"

The hand of Ralph Quimby was thrust out; the fingers fell like the teeth of a vampire upon the white shoulders of Nathalia; he pushed her, and with a faint cry, she sank in the abyss!

Ralph Quimby stood a moment on the verge of the pit, then, with a shriek of mad triumph, turned and fled.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF THE MINE.

The first rays of morning trembled in the east. The storm had passed, and the air was clear, fresh, and balmy. Ralph Quimby lay hidden in the thicket. He had not slept, nor could he; so perturbed and tossed was his dark mind. There were moments when remorse for what he had done rolled over him like the billows of a tempestuous sea; but the demon of revenge that had followed him so long, and stood at his side night and day, was not easily conquered.

His place of concealment was not far from the hut, toward which, raising himself a little from the ground, and putting aside the tangled bushes, he occasionally looked. He saw Whitelaw, presently, coming from that direction, advancing with slow and thoughtful steps. This man had not been long in the neighborhood of the Ten Miles Trace, or, if so, had kept himself remarkably close. Ralph had met him a few times, exchanging merely common salutations. They had shunned each other as if by mutual consent. It is true that some miners had in-

formed Ralph that this person, calling himself Whitelaw, had dwelt for years on the lake shore, living the life of a hermit in some hidden and unknown retreat. His sudden appearance at the hut would have surprised Ralph under ordinary circumstances; but, coming as he did, the event certainly was remarkable, not to say providential. The boy, Owen, too, the miner had encountered at various places, in his wanderings. The lad was harmless, and there being no natural affinity between guilt and innocence, Ralph secretly hated the demented youth.

As Whitelaw approached, the miner put himself in a position to observe him. The former paused near the thicket, looked abstractedly around, leaned against a tree, folded his arms upon his chest, and sighed.

"So sunshine comes after darkness," he said, "and calm after tempest. It is the law of the natural world—some say of the moral world, also; but it's a lie—a foul lie! Where is my sunshine? Where is my calm? I have suffered the curse of Cain without his crime."

Ralph crouched upon his hands and knees; he glared out from his lair like a beast of prey. In his eagerness, he stirred the bushes; but Whitelaw was too much absorbed to notice the movement. An evil face and an evil eye were on him.

"I was happy once," he continued, in a melancholy tone; "but that was years ago. Falsehood has done its work. I had a wife—I had a child; I have neither now—none, none to love me!"

There was a smile of grim satisfaction on the lips of Ralph Quimby; but it quickly passed, followed by a fit of trembling—a universal tremor of his frame. Several times he seemed disposed to spring from his hiding-place and cast himself upon Whitelaw, but as often restrained the impulse.

"Ah! why do I hope?" added Whitelaw, in the same pensive voice. "But I have hoped—I do hope! And for what? Heaven knows. I cannot tell!"

Whitelaw was agitated. He lifted his hat from his head, pressed a hand to his brow, and turned his face imploringly to heaven.

"'Tis he—'tis he!" muttered Ralph. "The light shines full upon him. The same accursed beauty of form and feature! That gray hair deceived me. Years have passed since I saw him. He is greatly changed, yet much the same, take him all in all. One may disguise himself from my love, but not from my hate."

"And why should I be forbidden to hope?" Whitelaw went on. "I may yet discover some clue—a faint trace—a footstep, as it were, in the sand. Such thoughts, such possibilities strengthen me."

Whitelaw replaced his hat, and returned to the hut, with the same slow, thoughtful step. Ralph Quimby arose; he gazed after the retreating figure. Various emotions stamped their images upon his countenance. First came hatred, then doubt, next a sort of secret terror.

"Robber! villain!" he exclaimed, shaking his clenched hand at the gradually-receding form of Whitelaw. "When you stole her love, you made an enemy of me; and such—such an enemy! There are not many such haters as Ralph Quimby! Ralph Quimby!—it does well enough to be called by. What matters it? I can be remembered as well, or hated as well (if it comes to that) by that name as any." The miner paused, pressed both his toil-hardened hands to his bronzed forehead, and added, in a voice broken with emotion:

"Woman! woman! thou makest saints or sinners of us all! Is my revenge complete? It might have been sweeter. What a thought!"

Ralph's features gleamed with strange eagerness.

"Perhaps it's too late? But there's a possibility."

He checked himself.

"No, no; the fall was too great," he hurriedly added. "Fool that I was, to be so hasty! It would have been the crowning-point of human malice."

Impelled by the new impulse that was upon him, Ralph ran from the spot like a deer. In fifteen minutes he reached the copper-mine. It was not without feelings of awe that he approached the shaft into which he had pushed Nathalia. He saw her small foot-prints on the brink, the broken earth where her feet had slipped off, and the bushes which her hands had caught. He stopped, and closed his eyes an instant. He was not so calloused to crime as not to have some sense of the wickedness of what he had done. His knees did tremble as he stood

there, and his swarthy cheeks grew white. Casting himself upon his face, he dragged his body to the brink of the shaft, and looked down. A mist was before his eyes, a dizzy sensation in his brain. He saw nothing distinctly, at first; a black, frightful abyss whirled beneath his vision. Then the sunlight darted through the darkness of the pit. He saw water. Did he see more? He did; he saw a form clinging to a piece of rift-wood. It was Nathalia!

Ralph Quimby arose with an exclamation of exultation, ran to a deserted hut near by, brought a rope, fastened it to the trunk of a tree, cast the other end of the coil into the mine, then, grasping it, descended boldly.

"Are you alive, Nattie? Speak, Nattie—speak. Don't be afraid, girl; I don't come to harm ye, now."

Nathalia looked up, with a pale and sickly expression.

"O Ralph! Ralph! you feared your work was not done. Take me from this horrible place! Let me die above ground, where the sun may shine on me. I am wet, cold, and dreadfully miserable. Have pity on me, Ralph! I have clung to this support so many, many hours! I thought the night would last forever. It's dreadful to be dying so long!"

Her voice was so low and weak that Ralph could scarcely hear her.

"Poor Nattie—poor Nattie!" he said.

"Give me a merciful death!" murmured Nathalia.

"Don't think of death, child! I was a mad-man last night. I was not Ralph Quimby, but a devil. I'm not a devil this morning, Nathalia. Reason has returned. Heaven has preserved you; and no one will rejoice more than I."

"I've been here so long, and the water is so cold!" gasped Nathalia.

By this time Ralph had reached her. He passed the rope around her slender waist, and fastened it. She shuddered when he touched her; she was not so far gone but his presence inspired her with terror. He worked himself up, hand-over-hand, then drew her after him. She was nearly insensible when she reached the top, chilled, bruised, and hopeless.

Ralph coiled up the rope, and carried it back to the hut; then taking Nathalia in his arms, hurried away with her.

She was too much exhausted to realize entirely what was transpiring, but had a vague consciousness that she was with Ralph Quimby. The incidents of the past night insensibly took the lights and shades of a dream. She had retired ill, or in low spirits, probably, and horrible fancies had sprung up, like mushrooms, in her sleep. Nathalia's thoughts surged to and fro, like a wreck at sea. The murdered man, Bernard Ross, Whitelaw, Owen, the mountaineer, Ralph and his *confères*, billowed fantastically through her brain. The trees passed her like shadows; the sunshine, the clouds, and the sky were mere phantoms, indistinct and indefinite, that flashed upon her like colors of a kaleidoscope. She was at rest at last; the motion had ceased. She closed her eyes wearily—heard the crackling of a fire, and some one moving about busily; then a savory odor greeted her nostrils—something warm touched her lips—an arm raised her—a voice said: "Drink, Nattie. Don't be afraid, child! Uncle Ralph is with you. He won't harm you now."

She opened her mouth mechanically, swallowed the nourishment which Ralph pressed upon her, and then sleep came, like an angel, to bless her.

CHAPTER V.

AT WHITELAW'S HUT.

Nathalia awoke. Mentally, she was conscious and lucid. She remembered the events of the previous night; every incident of that dark fraction of time came to her in connected order. She looked around her with a half-aphetic curiosity; she was in a hut, but not the one where she had lived with Ralph. It was small and slightly built—something after the fashion of an Indian lodge. She was lying on a couch of boughs, with a blanket spread over her. A fire of sticks burned in the centre of this simple shelter. A kettle was suspended over the fire from a pole supported by two forked sticks driven into the ground. An odor of venison pervaded the hut. She marked the circumstance, because it was an evidence that she had been cared for. And by whom? Ralph Quimby! All this was a mystery. What was its meaning? Had he really repented of his evil courses? Were there seasons in his life when he was not an accountable being? How could

she help remembering the frightful episode of the past night; the strange and contradictory manner of Ralph; the forced nocturnal flight; the exacted oath; the brink of the pit; the agonizing suspense; the dizzy, dizzy fall; the water; the shivering plunge; the clinging tenacity of her fingers when she arose, half strangled; then the imperfectly-sensed, unexpected rescue? All these things she could not but recall with a truthfulness that was but too dreadful.

There was a coming footstep; she heard it pressing the leaves. Ralph's form darkened the door; his inexplicable eyes rested upon her. The sight of him filled her with inexpressible repugnance. Fear chilled her to the heart.

"Are you awake, girl?" he asked. "How do you feel? You have had horrid dreams—haven't you? You've been tossing your arms wildly, and moaning."

"Horrid, indeed!" said Nathalia.

"But uncle Ralph didn't leave you; he has been within call all the while. You are feverish, I think."

Nathalia had never heard him speak so gently but once before, and that gentleness was the preface to a great crime. Ought she not to tremble. Was not this the warning rattle of the serpent?

"Don't talk to me," she said, coldly. "Leave me; I'll do better alone."

"Poor child!" answered Ralph. "Your brain has been in a terrible state."

He laid his hand on her head; she shrank from him in disgust.

"Keep away—keep away!" She shut her eyes and shuddered.

"Nattie, every person has his devil and his angel; my devil has come and gone; you need fear him no more. I'd blot out the past, if I could, but it is indelible; its black characters cannot be erased. I have been mad; but now I am not. I am sane, repentant, humble, remorseful. Conscience was not dead, but sleeping; it awoke with the rising sun, and I hastened to draw you out of the pit. Heaven willed that I should find you alive. My whole life shall be devoted to reparation. I will live, not for myself, but for you."

His voice and manner were humble; he sighed while speaking, and pressed his hand upon his heart in deep self-deprecation.

Nathalia turned her clear black eyes upon him inquisitively. There was something in her face that said: "You cannot deceive me."

"Your character—your crimes!" she exclaimed.

"I never felt them till now," he said, with downcast looks.

"I doubt you, Ralph Quimby!" answered Nathalia, in a voice that should have touched the heart of an ordinary sinner.

The man started as from a reverie; he contemplated that beautiful face. His good angel whispered to him. He had crouched beside the couch of the girl; but he now raised himself, stood erect, walked to the door, looked out upon the trees, felt the warm rays of the sun, and returned to Nathalia.

"Nattie," he said—and his voice was really impressive, "if an angel could reform a man, you would be that angel. There are moments when you make the villain tremble within me; when you shake a long and carefully-nurtured purpose."

"That came from the heart!" cried Nathalia. "Those words make me forget a part of my wretchedness—they cancel some of the pains of my lonely, neglected, and persecuted life; but they cannot, cannot make me forget the terrible truth that you are a bad, bad man, and the enemy of my happiness. You do not entirely understand me, Ralph Quimby. I have a strength that you have not measured, and never will!"

She sprang from her lowly couch and stood erect. Her eyes gleamed like rebuking stars.

"I will conquer you, yet! You shall lie at my feet as abject and humble as you now hypocritically feign to be. This little hand shall smite you!"

She held up her delicate white fingers; they waved to and fro before Ralph Quimby, who involuntarily recoiled, pushing her from him in pantomime.

"There is something in innocence, in beauty, and in truth. Nattie, Nattie, you are terribly prophetic! Why won't you be quiet? Why do you corner me in this way? You are nothing but a human creature."

He retreated till he stood in the door. He looked wildly at her.

"This won't do! I tell ye it won't do. I won't bear it. You've got a brain fever. I

know what ails you well enough. You can't change Ralph Quimby. That that's in him was born in him. What do you want of me? What do you expect? You've never been wronged and robbed. You don't know how sweet revenge is!"

"There is no rest for you," answered Nathalia. "You cannot hide from your sins. Evil is your trade. Murder does not startle you. In your heart, you were a murderer three times last night. Don't think that I can't understand you. Do not flatter yourself that I am the child you pretend to think me. For some reason, I am the object of your hatred. Come, Ralph Quimby, kill me decently if you must and will. Here I am, a girl, helpless and alone. Make an end of it all; for I solemnly tell you that, if I live, I will humble you. I will feel you beneath my feet!"

"Murderer? What right had they to come? What right had they to watch our movements? Is not poverty a curse? Is not gold life itself? It is—it is! The gold-secret is mine, and you are mine, and he is mine!"

"Who?" asked Nathalia.

"Ah! you'd give a world to know. I thank you, girl, for the question; it restores me to myself; it gives me back to the object of my life. I dare not remain near you. I will go out into the air; I will cool my hot brain and burning heart."

Ralph laughed like a maniac, and hurried from the hut. Nathalia looked after him till he was out of sight. Her heart was lighter for his absence, though there was sufficient on her mind to make her miserable. She glanced at the sun; it was half-way down the western arch, shining gloriously on the majestic trees of the forest. Her thoughts flew back to childhood, following the trail of her life to the present. She remembered when she was happier. She tried to fathom the mystery that surrounded her, and made her the victim of Ralph Quimby. He professed to be her friend, but she felt him to be her enemy. Never had he been so terrible of late. After the horrors of the past night, how could she tolerate his presence? How could she share the same shelter? She would escape. Better to perish in the woods—better to cast herself into the lake—better to be devoured by wild beasts, than to exist with him. His power was every day growing more terrible, his moods more dark and unaccountable. There had been times when she believed in him; when he threw a dark spell upon her—a dreadful fascination that rendered her docile even when shaken by secret terror. She feared that he might again regain that satanic mastery over her. Never before had she broken from him and defied him as she had recently done. She was glad that she had been endowed with sufficient moral strength to rise up against and rebuke him. Should she not struggle hard to keep this mental liberty? She ought; she would. She would throw off his black thralldom forever.

Which way should she fly? The sun was several hours high, and would light her footsteps a long way, if she improved the time, and her strength did not fail. She moved slowly from the hut, and walked a few paces. She discovered her weakness; she was bruised and lame, and her limbs refused to perform their office without pain and trembling. She sank upon the earth, and felt how impracticable, at present, was her purpose. She sobbed—she shed bitter tears of disappointment.

"Nathalia! Nathalia!"

Nattie looked up, and saw the man Whitelaw standing before her, regarding her with curiosity and sympathy.

"We have been seeking you," he added.

"We have had fears for your safety. I did not think to find you at my hut."

"Yours, sir?" said Nattie, with some surprise.

"Yes; I built it, and occasionally occupy it. Where have you been? Who brought you here? You look ill and wretched. Your garments, too, are torn and soiled."

He watched the changes of her countenance. He took her by the arm, and gently raised her from the ground.

"I was lost in the woods," answered Nathalia, with hesitation. "I wandered about a long time. The night was dark and stormy; so dark and so stormy!"

She glanced covertly from point to point to see if she could discover Ralph; she felt that he was near.

"But your clothes, girl? It did not rain mud?"

Nathalia saw Ralph's face peering from behind a tree close at hand.

"I believe I got a fall," she said. "The thunder and lightning terrified me."

"Yes, it was a fall!" answered Whitelaw, in a low voice. "The young man and I traced you to where you fell. I hope it was a fair fall; God knows I hope it was a fair fall!"

He regarded her with keen earnestness.

"All this is very singular," he said, anon. "Was he with you?"

"Was he? Yes—yes—he—he saved me!"

She staggered, touched her forehead faintly.

"Yes—I think he—he saved me." Then, in a whisper: "Speak low. We are watched. He drew me out"—in her natural voice. "I am muddled—am I not? What a fright! I have not looked at myself before."

"What is your name, my child?" he asked, gravely.

"Nathalia."

"Nathalia? Is that all?"

"Is it not enough? I have no other. I have been called Nathalia and Nattie from childhood."

"It is a pretty title; but people usually have a surname," returned Whitelaw, with a faint smile.

"You can call me Nattie of the woods, or Nattie of the Ten Mile Trace, or the girl of the forest, if one name be not enough."

"Or the girl of the sorrowful figure!" he added, running his eyes over her person.

Nathalia, by a stolen glance, assured herself that Ralph was still listening.

"Nathalia or Nattie, or Nattie of the woods—it matters little which," answered Whitelaw, in a kindly voice, "I feel greatly interested in you. If I have the power, I should like to do you good. I may be wrong, but I have the feeling that you live the life of a martyr."

"Lower! lower!" murmured Nattie.

"When my eyes first rested on your beautiful face, girl, I conceived a liking for you. I wanted to give you my hand in friendship."

"It was kind of you, indeed!" She turned her large eyes upon Whitelaw. "Your face looks friendly. I do not fear you as I do Ralph and his companions."

"How long have you been with Ralph, my child?"

"A long, long time! But we have not always lived here. Will you come to me again?"

"I mix not much with human creatures," he replied, absently. "I fear I am not one to please the young; but I dare say you will see me again. You are very weak and faint; you must go into the hut; you must lie down and rest."

He put his arm tenderly around Nathalia, who was ready to sink with exhaustion, and supported her to her humble couch in the hut, laid her upon it, covered her gently with the blanket. While he was thus employed, Ralph Quimby entered. He looked sharply at the countenance of each, then calling an amiable expression to his own, said:

"I thank you, sir, for this kindness to my niece. The poor girl got a fright last night. She fell into one of the copper-mines, but luckily it was two-thirds full of water. She got a wetting, but came up like a duck, and clung to a stick of timber, which kept her afloat till I could draw her out. It was a dangerous piece of business, though, going down after her."

"I should think so," replied Whitelaw, dryly.

"How do you find yourself, Nattie?" added Ralph, without noticing the quiet irony of the remark.

"Quite comfortable, I hope." Then to Whitelaw: "I don't know what I should do without the girl. The solitary life of a miner would kill me, I think."

"No doubt," answered Whitelaw, biting his lips. Then, with a strong effort to be agreeable, he added: "Have you lived long on the lake shore, Mr. Quimby?"

"Longer than I wish I had, though I've made a little in the mines. I've had my streaks of luck, like other people. Mining is profitable, when you get a good lead and know how to work it."

Ralph glanced from Whitelaw to Nattie, and from the latter back to the former. He wished to know what their thoughts were.

"I have heard rumors of diggings richer than copper," remarked Whitelaw, carelessly.

"Let me give my niece a little of this broth. You'll agree with me that she needs it. You observe a pale line around her mouth. It's a curious circumstance, but she always has that circle while she's ill."

"I see it plainly," said Whitelaw, quickly.

"It isn't a good sign; it indicates suffering." He laid his hand lightly on Nattie's brow. She had closed her eyes; she opened them and smiled when she felt the touch. The soul of Whitelaw was drawn toward her.

"I was so excited after extricating my niece from the shaft—so excited with joy at finding her alive, that I really did not know which way I went; and in the darkness mistook the way. I stumbled upon this deserted hut by the merest accident. Wasn't it singular?"

"It was, truly!" responded Whitelaw.

"Ah, sir! if you knew Nattie of the lake shore!"

Ralphed stopped suddenly.

"What, sir?" asked Whitelaw, abruptly.

"You'd do as everybody else does that sees her; you'd love her; and that's all about it. What's the use concealing things? I believe in honesty—don't you?"

Nathalia heard all this. She sighed, raised her darkly-fringed lids a little, and considered the countenance of Ralph Quimby. She wondered and doubted. She had better not have doubted. His eyes were fastened on her; his head had a slightly-oscillating motion to and from her. She shut him from her vision as quickly as possible, for she felt his power.

"You are very happy together—you and your uncle!" observed Whitelaw, calmly.

Ralph half arose from the block on which he had seated himself, and slowly settled back again.

"He must answer that," replied Nathalia.

"It gave her a cruel shock. Do you think there is any fever, stranger?" said Ralph, evasively. "I wonder if this hut will shed rain."

"It has," said Whitelaw. "I have passed many dry nights within it when it was wet outside."

"Perhaps it's yours? I didn't stop to trouble myself about such matters, you understand; I took the first shelter that offered."

"It is mine; but for her sake, you are welcome to it. I would sleep on the ground in a winter's night to give her shelter."

"There's room for all; stay. Nattie, bid him stay."

Nathalia did not speak; she simply held out her hand.

"I thought so," said Ralph, with a smile.

Now it happened that Nathalia was looking at him at the moment, and noticed that smile. She thought she saw a demon leering from his eyes. She regretted giving Whitelaw her hand; not for the simple act itself, but for the effect it seemed to have upon Quimby.

As for Whitelaw, he appeared to know everything without taking the slightest trouble of observation.

"This hut was built by my hands of the unbought and cheapest productions of nature. It required but trifling labor to fix these poles in the ground, join them at the top, and cover them with bark and boughs. My greatest enemy—if I have an enemy—should be welcome to it, if his necessities or misfortunes made him need it."

Ralph guarded his expression, but the lustrous eyes of Nathalia were on him.

"I have many homes, Ralph Quimby—that is your name, I believe—think not, therefore, that I value this. It derives its present value from the fact that it shelters this innocent head." His white hand trembled over the white forehead of Nathalia. "I come and I go; I have neither times nor seasons. I seek but solitude and forgetfulness. I go where impulse leads me. It would not be strange if Nattie should attract me here again. It is possible that I shall watch over her; it is certain that I shall watch you. I am a man of few words, but of much thought. Suffering has made me wise in some things. Expect me not, but always feel that I am not far off."

"I compel no man!" answered Ralph, with a slight frown. "I didn't know but you'd feel an interest in Nattie. But no matter; Ralph Quimby'll take care of her, though I haven't much knowledge of roots and herbs and the nursing such tender plants require."

Ralph arose and left the hut in apparent anger. Whitelaw sat by Nathalia's couch till the sun went down—through the dark hours of the night till the glorious orb came up again in the morning. He kept the fire burning brightly; he watched her slumbers; his careful eyes did not droop nor weary, and his ministrations were as gentle as a woman's.

Nathalia's mind fluctuated between darkness and lucidity. She talked but little. Whenever her weary eyes unclosed, she saw a kindly and

thoughtful face near her, and the man Ralph apparently sleeping soundly by the fire. So the night drifted on with Nattie.

CHAPTER VI.

PLAIN DEALING.

Whitelaw and Ralph walked from the hut together in the morning. The former was grave and silent; but the latter was disposed to be communicative.

"What do you think of her?" he asked, indifferently.

"Of whom?" said Whitelaw, absently.

"Of the girl; of my niece," answered Ralph.

"I believe she will recover from the shock."

"Shock?"

"Yes; the shock of the fall."

The parties stopped, as by mutual consent, and looked at each other.

"A wonderful young girl is Nathalia," said Ralph. "I've had a great deal of anxiety, first and last, on her account. She's too beautiful, you see, not to attract attention even in this wilderness. Many have tried to please her, but they were not men of her heart, nor mine. There was Nat Stratton, who took a liking to her, and has troubled me a long time with his askings."

"A ruffian! Why do you speak of such a creature in connection with Nathalia?"

"To show you how I'm bothered, and what anxieties I have about her. You think I'm a man of no heart, I s'pose, with less love for Nattie than for a pound of copper ore," returned Ralph, deprecatingly.

"It is time that I should speak," said Whitelaw, with sternness. "I have kept silent long enough. I demand some explanation of the scene I surprised in your hut? Nay, start not nor scowl! You attempted to take human life. There is murder in your heart, if not on your hands. I hate assassins and villains. Excuse yourself, if you can. For a few moments I will listen to you. Do not stop to coin falsehoods; the simple truth will serve you far better."

A dead silence followed. This diversion was manifestly as sudden as it was embarrassing.

"I'm not to be catechised by any man," answered Quimby, deliberately. "Nobody can compel me to do a thing against my will. I'll tell ye what happened, of my own accord, and not on compulsion. Nat Stratton had some words with Neil Travis, the young man that you found insensible on the floor, with a hammer beside him, which soon grew to violent altercation, ending in blows. Stratton drew his knife and used it, though I told him not to. Travis was wounded in several places. We thought he was dead, and hearing some one at the door, concealed the body under the bed. You saw the fellow who interrupted us?"

"Yes; his name is Ross."

"I don't care what his name is! I'll be watched and robbed by no man!"

"Watched?—robbed?" interposed Whitelaw, quickly.

"Ay! he came to dog us, and steal our secrets, if we had any. Haven't I seen him tracking us from day? Hasn't he scented us like a dog? Hasn't he kindled his fire every night within rifle-shot of mines or miners?"

"Every man has a right to seek for copper or for gold, the same as for the wild game that runs through the woods."

"But not to the harm of another man. He who steals my secret is a robber. He takes away my bread and my meat. He robs me, and he robs Nattie. And," added Ralph, striking his hands together, "I'll make an end of him wherever I find him! Ay! I say it, and I'll do it! You needn't talk to me about morality and crime, and all that; my means of living is my life. He who takes from me my support, takes from me my flesh, and my blood, and my bones; and I'll kill him as I would a thieving wolf! That's my justification, and all you'll get from me, now or ever."

During this vehement outburst, Whitelaw calmly looked at Ralph.

"Talk no more of it," he said, abruptly.

"On this subject, as on many others, we never shall think alike. I shall ask Neil Travis, should I again meet him, if this tale of yours be true. It is more than probable that you and I, Ralph Quimby, shall not part now for the last time. I'm dangerous, if trifled with; harmless if let alone. My present estimate of your character is low indeed. I do, I am free to confess, regard you as a most execrable villain! Nay, don't lay your hand on your knife, for, physically, I am your master. Don't be deceived by these gray hairs, Ralph."

"I'm not!—I'm not!" retorted Ralph, smiling and shrugging his shoulders. "No man knows better than I what those gray hairs conceal."

"Have you—"

"I have!" said Ralph, with a sneer.

"Well, it's of little consequence," answered Whitelaw, quietly. "I am what I am, and my secrets are not like thine."

"I ask them not—I care not to know them. Our life-lines run not parallel. We may be friends; we may be deadly enemies."

"Something tells me that we are the last," returned Whitelaw.

"I know not how that may be, but there's a bond between us."

"A bond?"

"Yes, a bond! I watched you last night. I noticed the changes of your face—the softness that was on it. Your heart was drawn to Nathalia, and you can't deny it."

"I cannot—I will not; neither do I wish to," replied Whitelaw, impressively. "She is as much an angel as thou art a—"

"A devil, you would add. Come, come! don't be too hard and bitter. You have little reason to push me so roughly to the wall. You abuse the confidence that I have placed in you. I trusted you freely with my niece. I saw you sitting by her, without a fear; even with pleasure, satisfied that you were pleased with each other. It was no common privilege that I gave you."

"There is truth in that, certainly. On this point you have the advantage, I admit. The girl is a sweet flower. I fear, I tremble for her. Her present life, her appearance here, the relationship between her and you, are to me inexplicable mysteries. I would snatch her from this solitude; I would save her from evil, and from you. Such are my feelings; I speak them frankly; make much or little of it."

"It's best to be plain," responded Ralph, after a short pause. "It's always best to understand matters at the beginning. Look upon me as you will; as villain or honest man; your opinion will not affect me a straw, if you keep it to yourself, and walk your own side of the path. You are free, for aught I care, to see Nathalia as a friend; but I warn you not to press her too much with questions. The moment you meddle with what I choose to have concealed, you can come no more; some morning you'll find the hut vacant and the bird flown. Let us once flit, and you may hunt the world over in vain to discover our new nest. Understand that, Whitelaw."

With these words, Ralph Quimby turned his back upon Whitelaw, and moved rapidly away.

CHAPTER VII.

A PROMISE CLAIMED.

Left alone, Nathalia arose, feeling better for the ministrations of her new friend. She could not help thinking how much he differed from those with whom she had come in contact of late years. A strange attraction drew her toward him. He awoke different emotions from those produced by the young manhood of Bernard Ross. Her instincts assured her that she could trust Whitelaw. How unlike were both these from those with whom she had been brought in daily association!

A night of rest and conscious security had done much to restore her; she was physically strong and mentally hopeful; but her fear of Ralph was in no wise lessened. The desire to escape from him had attained additional strength. Where should she fly? Who would befriend her? She would trust in Providence. She was sure it would be right to free herself from the terrible guardianship of Quimby. She knew she had nothing in common with a person subject to such frightful moods. She left the hut. Finding a pool of water, she looked at her reflected image on its surface, and was startled. Her hair hung disordered about her face; she was pale, and her garments were torn and stained. If Bernard Ross—Whitelaw had told her his name—should see her in that wretched plight! The thought was involuntary, but natural to a young girl.

While she stood contemplating her mournful shadow in the water, the bushes stirred and the mad boy, Owen, appeared.

"Do you like day better than night?" he asked. "Do you love to see your face in the water? Do you see shadows when the sun shines?"

"What brings you here, Owen? What do you come for?" answered Nathalia.

"Owen's devil told him where to find you.

Owen's devil knows everything. I could tell you ever so much; but I won't. What will you do, now? It's dark down in the pit, isn't it? How cold the water was! It sha'n't be done again; Owen won't let him come near you."

"Poor boy!" said Nathalia.

"Poor Nattie, too!"

"Poor as the poorest," murmured the girl, sadly.

"Do you s'pose, Nattie, that the sun'll set the trees on fire? It heats the water of the lake sometimes. 'Tisn't so hot as the lightning, though. Let us go, Nattie; let us go."

"Go where?" asked Nathalia.

"I don't care; anywhere to get away from him. It's so dreadful, you know, to see and hear him. Ah ha! he's a cunning fox; but you and I can outwit him. He's got nobody to tell him things like Owen has. Aren't you afraid he'll push you again? Let him push you if he dare!"

"How strangely you talk!"

The boy's wild, handsome eyes glittered upon her; they gleamed with a preternatural light.

"Come, Nattie, come!" he went on. "You are to walk with me; we are to go far—far for you, because your feet are tender and your limbs are not strong. But Owen is like a panther; he can run all day like the wolf, and never, never weary. Those who call Owen a fool, are the greatest fools."

"I will go, Owen, I will go! Only take me to a place where I shall never see Ralph again, and I will be content; I will believe that heaven has sent you."

"I'll take you, pretty one, where the dogs can't find you; where a starvin' wolf couldn't scent you out. Owen's devil is cunnin'."

"What do you mean by Owen's devil?" inquired Nathalia.

The boy put his finger on his lips and smiled; then looking around him cautiously, answered:

"That is a secret! I don't tell all I know; if I did, I should be the fool silly people call me. This way—this way. Follow, follow, follow!"

"Owen struck into the forest where the trees were nearest together and the foliage most abundant. He started off on a half-run; Nathalia found it impossible to keep up with him.

"Not so fast, Owen—not so fast. Remember that I am a girl, and not so swift of foot as you."

"Then I will go slow. I can go both easy and soft. I can run like a colt, or creep like an Indian on the trail. When you weary, you shall sit down and rest. When your little feet can't walk, Owen will carry you. You don't know how strong I am!"

He moderated his pace, choosing the most accessible places, removing sticks from her path, holding aside bushes, and giving her every attention in his power. The hut was left behind; and guided by the youth, she threaded the silent aisles of the forest.

"Sit down," said Owen, pointing to a little knoll; "sit down, and don't be afraid. The dark-lookin' man can't find you here. Owen will come back again."

"Don't leave me! don't leave me!" said Nathalia.

"It's foolish to fear! Owen's devil will take care of you. Ah, ha! ah, ha! You didn't think of that, did you?"

The youth ran a few steps and came back.

"He says I must hide you. Here's a spot. Come, pretty one, creep under this cedar; the trunk will make a chair for your back, and the roots are a cushioned seat of moss. There! isn't it nice and shady, and such a smell of the forest? I pull the boughs over you in this way. Now you are covered. Ralph might walk all around you and not see ye. Mad boys know a great deal! Folks don't get the better of Owen."

"I fear, good youth, that you'll go away and forget me. Your brain is unsteady, you know, and so many strange things go whirling through it," said Nathalia, anxiously.

"My brain," answered Owen, placing a finger on his forehead, "is right! You never saw a brain so right. I know every rod of the Ten Mile Trace. I could walk all over it in the darkest night, without falling into the rines, or being devoured by the wolf or catamount. I could find my way to the lake shore with my eyes blinded, if you should set me down in the middle of the woods and turn me round a score of times. I could guide you to Montreal, to the Indian country, to the border-settlements, or

far, far away where the white hunters trap for the beaver. We can cross to the great river on the other side of the lake, or strike the great trail of the wagon-trains that go up where the Mormons live. Never you fear my brain, Nattie! What I don't know, my whisperer will tell me."

Owen laughed softly, shook his finger cunningly, and darted away. The solitude was oppressive to Nathalia. She felt painfully her isolation and helplessness. The thought, however, that she was escaping from Ralph, served to console her. To be sure, she had some anxiety about the return of Owen, but placed sufficient confidence in the lad's faithfulness to keep herself measurably assured. She heard his returning steps. No, she did not; they were too heavy and shuffling. She was glad she did not leave her hiding-place, in obedience to her first impulse. Although perfectly concealed from observations, she could not help quaking a little as the sounds drew nearer. Peering from her cedar canopy, she saw Ralph Quimby and Nat Stratton approaching. The latter walked slowly, as if suffering from the wound he had received on that dark and terrible night—the scenes of which were so deeply impressed in her memory. She heard him say:

"You put me off and put me off, till I'm tired on't! Why don't you say what you will and won't do? That's my way."

"I don't feel like parting with her yet," answered Ralph, stopping with his face toward Nathalia's covert, who feared that his ferret-eyes had already discovered her. "I can't get along without a housekeeper. She isn't exactly the right kind for you, Nat; you're a trifle too coarse for her. She'd do very well for me."

"For you?" retorted Stratton. "It's agin the law! One can't marry his niece."

"Law don't get up so far as this! However, I said nothing about marrying the girl."

Nathalia shuddered. She never felt so much horror of Ralph Quimby. Stratton stood staring at him with a dark and sullen expression.

"What do you think of the young fellow that called at the hut the other night?" asked Ralph. "He's a bold, energetic youngster, and if I know anything of human nature, he took a deep and sudden fancy to Nattie. What do you say to him as a rival, Stratton?"

Ralph looked covertly at his comrade. The effect of his question was instantaneous. A rifle was slung at his back; he unslung it, and planting the breech violently on the ground, he leaned over the muzzle, and glaring steadily into Quimby's face, exclaimed:

"I'll have no rivals! Neither you, nor young Ross, nor Whitelaw, nor anybody else!"

"Whitelaw!" repeated Ralph, starting.

"Ay!" growled Stratton.

"A man with white hair!" laughed Ralph.

"He's not so old but he might be older," said Stratton, with peculiar significance. "A bargain's a bargain, Ralph Quimby. I shared the golden secret with ye on the strength of your promise; and no longer ago than night before last, I got a bullet through my neck, within half an inch of my jugulars, in tryin' to keep it from that wanderin', peerin' young rascal, called Ross. I tell ye, Ralph" (he struck his horny right hand on the muzzle of his rifle), "you shan't cheat me! And as for rivals, I swear to ye I'll shoot every one of 'em!"

The miner's eyes looked dangerous. Ralph thrust his head toward him, and said, in a clear, low voice: "Begin with Ross, then!"

There was murder in those tones.

"By heavens, I will!" cried Stratton, striking his weapon still more energetically upon the earth. "But mark me" (he laid a rough finger on the back of Quimby's hand), "I won't stop there, if need be! Do you know what that means?"

There was a brief silence.

"That's my way!"

The manner in which the man pronounced these simple words, made them mean much.

"And a decisive way it is," responded Ralph, raising his shoulders. "You needn't remind me of anything that's passed between us, Stratton, for my memory is tolerably good; although the secret wasn't so much of a secret as it might have been; for I was on the trail, you know? Besides, old friends ought to divide."

"Bah! you wouldn't, if you'd discovered a vein of gold as big as Missouri River! I'm not so larned as you be; but I'm no fool! Don't you ever buy me, Ralph Quimby, for a fool."

"Your business," answered Ralph, coolly and measuredly, and with an indescribable glance of the eye, "is with the fellow called Ross!"

"And why?"

"There's *love* there; that's all! If you can't comprehend that, I've no more to say; and you'd better go down and join the emigrants that are fitting out for Salt Lake."

"There's *more'n* that. Here's a bullet-hole in my neck. He knows rather more than he should, too. Then there's Neil Travis, who's likely to git well. Between the two, we shall be in close corners by-and-by."

"We are not in the States just now, Nat Stratton. We're a trifle over the line, you may remember?"

"Judge Lynch don't care for lines. 'Twould be easy enough for 'em to get a few men together, and hunt us out of the Ten Mile Trace."

"I know it; but your business is with Ross. I shouldn't wonder," he added, carelessly, "if you found him in my hut, nursing Travis."

"Ay! and that cursed mountaineer, too. He shoots plums centre, he does. I wish he's among his squaws, and traps, and buf'lers agin!" retorted Stratton, frowning darkly.

"Don't think I'll forg-t him! He liked to have cracked every bone in my body." Ralph scowled till his bushy eyebrows met in a deep furrow. "The hut is in that direction. You'll find Nattie and I in a line running due north from the deserted copper-mines."

"Keep your word; that's all I ask. I know what to do. Business first. That's *my* way!" Stratton threw his rifle across his arm, and strode abruptly away. Ralph lingered a few moments, and left the spot with less haste.

CHAPTER VIII.

OWEN'S ISLAND.

Nathalia saw Ralph move from the vicinity of her covert with emotions that we shall not attempt to describe. The conversation between him and Stratton had given her a still deeper insight into his character. If possible, she feared him more than ever. Her principal anxiety now was for the return of Owen; for she did not, and could not, feel safe so near her natural relative. Her suspense in that respect was speedily terminated. Owen soon appeared, with his rifle on his shoulder, and a large bundle in his left hand.

"You've been gone a long time, Owen. Where have you been?" Nathalia inquired.

"To the hut," answered Owen, "to get Nattie's things. You'll want clothes to wear where we are goin', and I've got 'em here safe. I watched my chance and stole in. Ah! Owen knows how to work the wicked ones! Here's a hard biscuit, Nattie; take it and eat as you come along. People are weak when they don't eat."

"Where are we going, Owen?"

Nathalia looked earnestly at his wild, handsome face.

"Never you mind where we're goin'! You'll be safe if you keep with me. You see my rifle? I can shoot with it a long, long distance. I've lots o' powder in this horn, and here is a pouch full of bullets."

The girl followed Owen with childlike trust. She felt an assurance that he was harmless and faithful. She was sure that his strange instincts would not lead him far astray. Indeed, the boy appeared to her as one under the guidance of superior wisdom. She traversed the forest where there was no path; and through depths that had apparently never been pressed by human feet. Often the wild deer crossed their way, while occasionally the wolf was seen stealing cautiously among the trees, ready to scamper off at the first appearance of danger.

They finally emerged from the wood, and a great sheet of water stretched before them far as the eye could see. It was Lake Superior.

"Isn't it nice?" said Owen. "Look down and you can see your face. Perhaps you can see my whisperer there. I can see him in *this*." Owen took a fragment of a mirror from his pocket, and looked at it with singular earnestness. "Yes, here he is! here's Owen's devil! the one that whispers! We shall do very well as long as he tells us what is right. He's got brain enough, I tell ye!"

Nathalia began to have misgivings. Had she not placed too much reliance in the sagacity of this wild boy? Here she was, she knew not where, on the shore of the lake, far, far, doubtless, from human habitation, with no clue to guide her to the haunts of men.

"Well, Owen, you've led me away, but you don't seem to know what you are doing. Where shall we find that shelter and safety that you have talked of?" she said, anxiously.

"You think my wit is at an end—don't you? But such a thing as that can't happen to Owen.

Look the way my finger points. Don't you see the dry land, and the trees growing out of the water?"

"An island!" said Nathalia.

"A kingdom!" exclaimed the youth, with joyful enthusiasm. "I am the king; you are the queen."

"But how are we to take possession of our kingdom?" asked Nathalia, smiling. "I can't swim, Owen, unluckily."

"But I know something that *can* swim!"

Owen ran to a cluster of bushes that grew low down on the shore, and dragged out a small canoe.

"What do you think of this, Queen Nattie? The whisperer and I float on the lake in this. Fine times we have of it, talkin' and laughin'. Get in, my princess!"

The sun is high, the moon is low,
No one shall follow where we go."

He sung these lines to a weird melody, and dipped his paddle in the water.

"I'm a little fearful, Owen," said Nathalia, hesitating.

"It is all right, Nattie—it is all right. Step in boldly and sit still. This bark will carry three of us well enough. Owen's devil is light, but he's a good paddler, and never rocks the canoe."

Nathalia seated herself in the frail vessel, which glided quietly from the shore. She scarcely dared to breathe, lest she should disturb the equilibrium of the birchen shell.

"Can you read?" asked Owen. "I can. I've read about kings and queens, princesses, lords, knights, and nobles."

The youth's earnest countenance was turned upon Nattie. Light and shade fluctuated over his face, like the little wavelets on the lake.

"Who taught you?" asked Nathalia.

"Owen's devil. Did you think the whisperer knew how to read? He does, though. He looks pleased when I laugh, and sad when I cry."

The canoe shot onward to the light strokes of Owen. They neared a little island, which was much farther distant than it appeared when seen from the shore. The youth propelled the canoe half way around this green spot in the lake, and landed upon the west side.

"It's a fine kingdom," said Owen, "and there's nobody to take it away from us." He drew the vessel from the water and carefully concealed it.

"Come, Nattie, and I'll show you where King Owen lives."

He led the way up the gently-rising shore of the island, and entered the sylvan bowers of his isolated retreat. Nathalia found a soft carpet of grass beneath her feet, while upon each hand grew trees, shrubs, and flowering wild-plants. Owen conducted her quite to the centre of the diminutive island, where she perceived, amid the abundant foliage, a lodge, built after the Indian style. To her, notwithstanding its solitude, it looked inviting. Here, for a time, she believed she should be safe from the pursuit of Ralph Quimby. She trusted that before he succeeded in finding her, she would be able, by some means, to reach one of the border settlements.

"Do you live here?" she asked.

"Owen lives in a good many places. You can't lose him anywhere."

"But do you dwell here all alone? Does not the man Whitelaw sometimes visit you?" She looked searchingly at Owen.

"Do you like to hear the waters mutter on the shore when the wind blows?" he answered. "There is a deal of music here when there's a storm on the lake; the island trembles, but it won't sink—the foundation is so strong. Sometimes the trees bend, and strange noises float through the air. But Owen's fire burns brightly in his lodge, and he talks with the whisperer all the while. Come inside, Queen Nattie, and see how nice it is. But it shall be ever so much nicer. I'll bring fresh boughs, and you shall have a royal bed of moss, and a throne of oak and evergreens."

Owen entered the lodge and Nathalia followed. What was her surprise at seeing a fire burning cheerfully in the centre, near which was sitting, cross-legged, a dark-skinned, bright-eyed little girl, whose dress consisted of a plaid tunic reaching a trifle below the knee. A squirrel was perched upon her head, and a tame beaver was gnawing a stick beside her. Nathalia paused and considered this singular group with unfeigned wonder, while Owen watched her countenance with satisfaction.

"These are my subjects," he cried, exultingly. "They mind me at once; if they didn't, I should have their heads struck off, the same as they do in the stories in the books."

"Who is this little girl, Owen?" Nathalia inquired.

"Oh, that is Tawny!"

"Tawny?"

"Yes, that's her name. A dark one—isn't she? Well, I don't know but the dark ones are just as good as the white ones."

The girl sat bolt upright, without in the least noticing Nattie or the boy.

"What in the world is she?"

"A little Ingin girl. Don't you see she's got an Ingin's eyes and ways?"

"She's a mere child," replied Nathalia.

"She's big enough to know a good deal," replied Owen. "She brings sticks for the fire; she can cook venison over the coals, and she stays close in the lodge when I'm gone. Jump up, Tawney, and be smart." The child arose and looked inquiringly at Owen. "She's a pretty good slave," he added. "She never disobeys me when she knows what I mean. Kings must have slaves, you know, Queen Nattie."

"I hope you don't abuse her, Owen?" said Nathalia, quite bewildered.

"Oh, no! I never hurt her nor strike her, nor speak cross to her. She likes me because I took care of her."

"Where did you find her? I can't understand why you should have the poor little creature in your possession."

"Ah, ha! I know about that. I'll tell you sometime. It was a long way to the North where I found her, and she was lost in the woods and dreadfully hungry. I didn't give her as much as she wanted, at first; she was as greedy as a little wolf, and weaker than that squirrel. You ain't afraid of squirrels, and beavers, and little Ingin girls—be ye? They're good company, I tell ye! Tawny has lots of tricks; she pays her way as she goes. Her clothes don't cost much, you see."

"I should think not!" replied Nathalia, glancing at the girl's bare legs and feet.

"She dances and sings before King Owen when he's tired, and the beaver capers and the squirrels jump and twitter. A very industrious subject is the beaver; he cuts the firewood with his sharp teeth, and sweeps with his flat tail. I call him my wood-chopper."

"All this is very odd!"

"You shall see her dance. At it, Tawny—at it! This is Queen Nattie. She is goin' to live here, and you must do as she bids you. Kings and queens cut off little girls' heads, and beavers' heads, and squirrels' heads, too."

Tawny commenced an active but not very graceful Indian dance. She certainly worked with all her strength to amuse her eccentric sovereign. Half a dozen more squirrels appeared from the top of the lodge, skipped about the girl, chirping merrily, while the beaver beat upon the ground with his tail.

"The squirrels are my musicians, and the beaver is my drummer. This is a right merry kingdom, Nattie."

"It is, indeed!" replied Nathalia, smiling.

"The poor child exerts herself, evidently, to please you. She is as light and active as the squirrels themselves. That will do, Owen, that will do! Such violent exercise will hurt her."

"No danger; she is used to it. She must cook. We are hungry, Tawny; fly round and get us some supper."

Immediately the child stopped dancing, and from a little recess in the lodge, concealed by skins drawn across it, brought forth various cooking utensils. Nathalia was not a little astonished at the completeness of Owen's domestic economy. Seeing her surprise, he was greatly delighted, and informed her that he had brought those articles, at various times, from the settlements.

As for Tawny, her strength was not equal to her will. She moved about with much eagerness and zeal, staggering beneath weights too heavy for her. Nattie, struck with her childish devotion, hastened to assist her, notwithstanding Owen protested that Tawny would do it all, only give her time. "She sometimes," he philosophically observed, "tumbles into the fire and burns her hands in the ashes, and hangin' on the kettle; but she don't care for it a bit. Up she jumps, and at it she goes again; and the whisperer and I watch her and laugh. She loves to work for Owen; don't you, Tawny?"

The child smiled and nodded, knowingly.

"She seems to understand you? Can she talk English?"

"English and Ingin, both; but she isn't talkative, though there are times when we say considerable to each other."

The sun was now setting, and with various

emotions Nathalia shared the simple fare of Owen, in the midst of his strange, fantastic, lake-girt kingdom. She thought of many things; how could she help it? The very novelty of her situation was calculated to awaken reflection. Her childhood, her loneliness, her varied life, her blunted affections, the Ten Miles Trace, the miner's hut, with its experiences, Ralph Quimby, his unwelcome guardianship, and everything connected with him, drifted through her mind. Above all, a lurking fear that she would be sought for and discovered, haunted her.

Encouraged by Owen, she tried to do justice to his hospitality. He appeared to her the visible hand of a friendly Providence. How often she paused to look at him and his whimsical and novel surroundings. She dreamed that night of King Owen and his subjects.

CHAPTER IX.

A MEETING IN THE WOODS.

It will be remembered that Nat Stratton left Ralph Quimby under the influence of the darker and more vindictive passions of his nature. Jealousy rankled in his heart, and hatred came as its natural result. Young Ross was now the particular object of his resentment. The dire purpose that he had formed, and avowed to Ralph, grew stronger, and shaped itself in more distinct outlines as he hurried on.

A doe bounded across his path, stopping with the curiosity peculiar to its kind, within easy rifle-range of Stratton. He leveled his weapon to bring it down, when a well-directed shot from another hand laid the poor creature low. The smoke of the discharge showed him in what direction to look for the successful hunter. Casting a sullen and hasty glance to that quarter, he saw Bernard Ross reloading his rifle. The sight gave him a thrill of exultation. Before him was the object of his burning jealousy—his rival—the man whom Ralph had assured him stood between him and Nathalia. The discovery, then and there, in such a frame of mind, affected him much. A strange tremor shook his nerves. He dared not immediately attempt the cowardly act he meditated; his shaking hands might send the leaden messenger wide of its human mark. Besides, he now perceived that it was not so easy a thing to rob a fellow-creature of life in the manner he had contemplated. He wanted an excuse, however flimsy. A quarrel would afford him a pretext! The thought he regarded a happy one, and the doe would furnish the desired provocation.

By this time Bernard had observed him. Stratton strode toward the deer; it was quite dead, although the warm blood was still flowing from the wound.

"How dare you," he cried, "meddle with game started by me!"

"I was not aware," answered Bernard, approaching, "that I had done so."

"It is false!" retorted the miner, insolently. "You saw me slow-trackin' the animal; you saw me raise my rifle to fire; and I've a mind to chastise ye for your interference."

"Before proceeding to that extremity, I shall have to be consulted," replied Bernard, calmly. "I recognize you perfectly. The scene in Quimby's hut can never pass from my memory. I shall not soon forget your murderous countenance when you approached me with the miner's hammer. It would have been better for society had my aim been truer."

"I know," returned Stratton, working himself more and more into a passion, "that this is not the first offence. You tried to kill me at Quimby's cabin, while I was carelessly passin' you with the sledge in my hand. I'm glad you put me in mind o' it. Your bullet came within an ace of woundin' the great arteries of the neck; in which case I should bled to death in a few minutes. We're alone, now, equally armed, and the thing can be settled. All you've got to do is, to walk 'f to yonder tree, turn round, put your back to it, count three, and commence firin'."

"I'm not afraid of the duel," answered Bernard, "when urged upon me with sufficient provocation, and by one whose character entitles him to satisfaction. I confess I can see no reason why I should meet a villain on equal ground and terms."

"I knowed pretty well what you'd say!" sneered the miner, with a menacing scowl. "A chap who'd shoot me onawares, or steal my game from under my eyes, won't, in the course of natur', stand up and take shot for shot, like a man."

"Although you are an assassin and a ruffian, I feel in the mood of giving you the pastime you demand. I warn you beforehand, that I am

a good shot; I'm as sure to hit you, at the distance you have indicated, as I am that you deserve to be hit."

"You can't scare me! Nat Stratton has seen too much of rough-and-tumble life to be wilted down by a few highfalutin' threats. We miners are hard boys. We haven't been miners always; we've been in the huntin' an' trappin' line, some'at. We've had skrimmages with both Ingins and Mexicans that would make your hair bristle to hear of."

"You may have been, for aught I know or care, a horse-thief or border marauder!" retorted Ross. "That, however, has nothing to do with our present purpose. If I understand you, you wish me to fall back to yonder tree, face you, count three, and fire?"

"That's it exactly!" growled Stratton.

"But what guaranty shall I have that you will not treacherously fire upon me the moment my back is turned?"

"Oh! you think I'm an Ingin, don't ye? Aren't you afraid I'll skulp ye, too?"

"Why not fall back yourself, then?"

"Because that would throw me too much into the shade; and rascal as you be, I want to give ye fair play. I fight fair, I do. What kind of a mark should I make, in there, where the shadows of them tall trees would fall on me like clouds?"

"You would make a bad mark in there, to be sure; so I'll trust you. My sense of hearing is particularly good—I can hear the click of a rifle-lock as far as another. But stop! there's a better way—I'll walk backward."

"Ay! that's your natur'! Them as likes to sneak and pry into what isn't none o' their business, and mistrust others of what they never thought of, allers take good care of their precious bodies," replied the miner, with ill concealed chagrin.

"I can see, at least, a part of your purpose," rejoined Bernard, cocking his rifle. "You would fasten a deadly quarrel upon me and take me at an advantage, if possible. I am here without a friend; you may have a dozen within call, for aught I know."

"Why do you cock your rifle?" cried the miner, in alarm, partially screening himself behind a tree.

"I've observed," answered Bernard, "that your weapon has been cocked during the whole of this altercation. What is fair for you, is fair for me. Don't terrify yourself unnecessarily. The only favor that I ask is, the strict observance of the conditions you have proposed."

Bernard Ross began to fall back, slowly and cautiously, to the designated distance. The ground was rough, and being obliged to divide his attention between Stratton and his footing, his progress was attended with no little difficulty. But a few yards were between him and the tree, when his heel tripped upon a root; he fell, and his rifle was discharged in his descent.

"Foul play! foul play!" shouted the miner, and springing forward, took deliberate aim at Bernard. His finger was on the trigger, when his rifle was suddenly struck up, and a rough hand grasped him by the arm. The weapon was discharged, but the bullet went whistling through the tops of the trees.

"This is the way ye do things down by the big lakes, is it? You're an old catamount—ain't ye?"

It was Kid Kerly, the mountaineer, who spoke.

"I wish I's hungry, I do!"

"Let me alone!" said Stratton, endeavoring to shake off Kerly. "This ain't none o' your concerns, I reckon. It's a fair duel, though he fired first."

"Yes; I seed him when he fired! 'Twas a pooty aim—wasn't it? Do folks ginerly tumble down when they shoot, hereabouts? 'Tisn't the custom up in the mountains! Wah!"

"He fired afore the word," persisted the miner, doggedly, "and my shot was fairly due. I give sich treacherous fellows their own. That's my way!"

"And a confounded bad way 'tis!" retorted the mountaineer. "You never trapped, and starved, fought Ingins, and lifted ha'r—did ye? I allow not!"

"Keep your hands off, mister!" muttered Stratton, fiercely.

"If you want to fight, try me. I haven't chawed up a feller-bein' for nigh on to three weeks. I'm gittin' right miser'ble and out o' sorts. Tackle this old hoss, won't ye?"

"I've no quarrel with you, Kid Kerly, and I won't fight ye. I'd rather fight a grizzly bear or a wounded buff'ler, than have anything to do with a Camanche from the mountains," answered the miner, with less bravado.

"What shall I do with this critter, youngster?" asked Kerly, turning to Bernard, who had approached, and was loading his rifle.

"If you could hand him over to the civil law, you would do the world a favor; but as that cannot be, we shall have to trust the fellow's punishment to Providence."

"Not altogether! I shall help Providence a little. Wah!"

With this short preface, the mountaineer seized the miner with both hands, raised him nearly as high as his head, and dashed him upon the ground, where he lay stunned some moments.

"That's mountain manners!" said Kerly. "Sarved Ralph Quimby so t'other night. It gives a mighty shock to the system; but it's better for some than a 'lectric battery. Git up, you runagade!"

The mountaineer gave the prostrate man a push with his foot, who recovered his feet very slowly indeed. His swarthy features had grown strangely white. Bernard read a deep and deadly intensity in his eyes. He did not threaten, fume, and work himself into a heat; but stood quietly looking at Kerly and Ross. He even smiled; but it was not a pleasant smile to see.

"Have you done?" he asked, in a low voice. "Have you any further business with Nat Stratton?"

His tone and manner jarred on the nerves of Bernard.

"Wah!" said Kid Kerly.

"I hope we may never meet again," observed Bernard.

The miner laughed ironically—fit accompaniment for his smile and voice.

"You'd better go!" added the mountaineer, who was now really losing temper. "I can kill game or an enemy, in self-defence, as well's another; but I don't keer to have anything worse nor that on my mind."

"I'm goin'!" replied the miner, huskily. "I never remember things—I don't. No, no! Ha, ha! Sartinly not. That's my way!"

He took his rifle from the ground where it had fallen, threw another startling look at Bernard and the mountaineer, and turning deliberately, vanished in the intricacies of the forest.

"There's an enemy for ye!" remarked Kerly, coolly. "A Sixux or a Rapaho on your trail, would be a beauty to him! There's death in the critter's eye, or I'm no judge o' natur'."

"I never saw a worse countenance. His glance really chilled me," replied Bernard, thoughtfully and uneasily.

"He'll do more nor chill ye," said the mountaineer, brushing back his shaggy locks; "he'll kill ye!"

There was something peculiarly impressive in the manner in which these simple words were uttered; they had their effect upon the young man. He wiped cold drops of perspiration from his brow.

"How long you been here?" asked Kerly abruptly.

"In this particular part of the country, a few weeks."

"How many enemies have you made in that time?"

The mountaineer drew some of the weed from his pouch and buried it in his mouth.

"Four, at least," replied Ross.

"If you make four enemies in a few weeks, how many 'll you make in a good many weeks? You'd better go home, young man."

Kerly gave his jaws a rotary motion and crushed the tobacco into a pulp.

"Not for a world!" exclaimed Bernard, earnestly.

The mountaineer peered inquisitively into his face, crushing the innocent leaf all the while.

"Copper-mines?"

Bernard shook his head.

"Gold?"

"No."

"Gal?"

The blood rushed to Bernard's cheeks.

"Trapped!" exclaimed the mountaineer, striking his hand upon his hip. "Trapped like a young beaver! It's onsartin game you've started, lad, and I wouldn't wonder if you beat about the bush a long time, and git nothin' for your pains. I know who's done the mischief; I can tell the trail of love as well as the next man."

The trapper waited for Ross to answer; but he did not.

"Never look so serious about it, man! It's an accident that happens to the best folks, sometimes. She's a pooty critter, with eyes like a doe."

"Who?" stammered Bernard.

"Nattie, of the Ten Mile Trace!" answered Kerly.

"She is beautiful, indeed!" murmured the young man. "Too fair, too good for such companionship. I wonder where she came from, and why she is here? There is mystery around her. Ralph Quimby is a bad man. She must be withdrawn from his guardianship."

"Whatever you do, look out for your own safety. You'll find yourself murdered some mornin', if you don't sleep with one eye open, like a cat."

"Don't forget to include yourself in the same risk. If I can interpret the meaning of the miner's eyes at all correctly, he won't soon forget you. You gave him an ugly fall, mountaineer."

"Do you think I'm blind, boy? Have I tramped the wilderness thirty year for nothin'? Kid Kerly knows when the devil's in a man. I've an eye and an ear for him. Wah!"

CHAPTER X.

MARY DANTON.

"Let us walk," said Bernard. "There has been a great change in the atmosphere. The air is heavy and oppressive. Speak to me, mountaineer."

Kid Kerly threw back, according to his custom, the tangled masses of his long hair from his tanned forehead. There was a sympathetic gleam in his sagacious eyes. The man hadn't lived for nothing; he had learned many things hidden from more pretentious people. His years of intimacy with simple Nature had taught him much that a higher degree of civilization had not conferred upon those who laid higher claims to knowledge. He quietly threw the lock of his rifle under his right arm, supporting the barrel with the hand of the same, cast a searching look at the sky, at mother earth, which his tireless feet had pressed for so many years, then considering Bernard a moment, answered:

"Good! let us walk; it's what I like; it won't harm ye. But the air, youngster, hasn't changed; it's the same: the change is in you. We don't often see things as they really be; we only see what's inside. Wah!"

"There's a dread upon me," returned Ross.

"Some at more; the witchery of Nattie is on ye, too. Well, that isn't uncommon. You come out to old Superior, perhaps, with a vision o' gold in your head; and now it's a vision o' woman. I have had them kind o' sights myself."

"You?"

"Ay! red Injun—nothin' but Red Injun! But such a specimen! Mayhap you don't believe in red loveliness? Wasn't she a beauty, though! Put together in such shape! Wah!"

Bernard looked at his companion, and, mechanically shouldering his rifle, followed him.

"Don't be downcast," added Kerly. "These diseases work out their own cure. Exercise is what you want; keep your blood stirrin', and there's no feminine that can harm ye."

The mountaineer moved through the woods, and Ross trod in his footsteps. He was not afraid; he had as small a share of coward blood as any one; but there was upon him a boding certainty of insecurity, which, allied with the haunting fear for Nathalia, made him unhappy. So far as Kid Kerly was concerned, motion was a necessity of his nature, and he threaded the mazes of the forest with a confident and steady step. He perceived that there was a morbid action in Bernard's mind, and was willing to divert his thoughts, and act a friendly part.

The young man warmed with walking. The farther he left behind the spot where he had encountered the miner, the lighter he felt.

"Stop!" said the mountaineer, suddenly.

"Some livin' critter is near."

"I heard it," Bernard replied. "It was the wind sighing in the trees."

"Wind? There isn't no wind! A squaw's breath would stir the leaves more. Be quiet!"

Putting his ear to the ground, the mountaineer listened some minutes. He arose, and said:

"It's hereaway. Come on, softly."

"I can hear nothing," replied Bernard.

"In course not!" returned Kerly. "Your head is full of Nattie, and that surly miner. Now I'll show ye that we wild men of the mountains know some at."

A short walk brought them to a small opening in the forest. Kerly paused, and pointed with his finger, and Ross beheld a female, sitting at the root of a tree, her face resting in her hands, her hair disheveled and trailing over her shoulders, her garments torn, her feet bare and bleeding.

Bernard and his more experienced companion gazed at her in silence. The object of their attention was unconscious of their nearness. She sighed and wept, and bewailed her fate in a melancholy voice.

"'Tisn't the wind sighin' through the trees!" whispered Kerly.

"No; who can the poor creature be? Let us hasten to relieve her."

Bernard spoke in a whisper; but, low as it was, the female looked up, and, seeing two men, sprang up with a cry of surprise. For a moment she was obviously agitated by conflicting emotions, not knowing whether to remain or fly. The countenance of Bernard, however, gave her courage. She stood with clasped hands, her person thrown forward, her eyes fixed earnestly on the strangers.

"Don't be skeered," said the mountaineer. "We ain't woman-eaters, nor Sioux, nor Rapa-hos. We're cl'ar white, and that's a fact."

"Then you'll take care of me, I'm sure? I'm lost, and in a miserable, miserable plight!" she answered, earnestly.

"I should say as much, young woman! You look as if you'd had a long fast and a long run in the woods. You're just about tore to bits. Wah!"

"Don't be afraid," said Bernard. "You have found friends who will take care of you. What strange accident brought you here?"

The young woman—she was young—advanced a step, tottered, and sank to the earth.

"That gal's pooty much done for," said Kerly. "There's a pale face for ye, I reckon. See them tender feet, and them white hands! No squaw 'bout them. She isn't used to trampin' the woods, she isn't. Her gown's stripped into ribbons!"

"What shall we do for her?" asked Bernard, helplessly.

"Lord, man! I can fetch her round in no time, pervidin' the life hasn't clean gone out of her; in which case there'd be nothin' to build on. We must fall back on the *habituels*, lad. Vitality is what she wants, and where shall we find that if 'tisn't in the nat'ral elements. While I clap this flask to her little mouth, do you gather some dry sticks and strike a fire; she must have warmth and food as well as drink."

"Carefully, carefully, mountaineer! Don't use her too roughly," cautioned Bernard, as Kerly raised the young woman's head, and wet her lips with some drops from his flask.

"Don't talk to me!" he answered. "In the calico line I'm as gentle as a mother. I don't take hold of her like a grizzly, do I? Don't I know that they're tender, and must be handled keerfully like chany tea-sets? They're made of finer airth, and are a sight brittler nor we he-critters be. We want tougher ware up in the mountains. Traps and trapsacks! but this here is a long faint. There's no breath on her lips that I can feel. Her natur's different from mine. Why! put this flask to my lips, if I's right on the p'int o' desolation, 'twould thrill my nerves like a 'lectric eel!"

Full of sympathy, Bernard ran and chafed her hands and arms. He noticed that her skin was very white, and her face fair. He began to believe her really dead, when a slight motion of the lips, and a scarcely perceptible tremor of her person, proved that the vital spark was not yet extinct.

"She swallows! she swallows! She's comin'—comin'! Good! She's shivery enough, though. See to your fire, lad. 'Tisn't very cold, but her blood is so thinned by starvin', that she needs a heap o' warmth." The young woman was finally restored to animation, but not to consciousness. A fire was built, near which she was placed, on a soft couch of boughs. The heat, together with the stimulant administered by the mountaineer, revived her wonderfully; but she continued too weak to converse.

Leaving her in charge of Bernard, Kerly went in pursuit of game, returning before a great while with some birds, one of which he prepared and roasted with the greatest care, giving to his patient the choicest and tenderest portions, which she ate with avidity.

It was now near sunset, and it was manifestly impossible to convey the young woman to the miner's hut that night; so the two men set themselves at work, and soon built a camp to shelter her until she was able to walk, and make known her wishes. Her body refreshed, and her mind relieved from fears, she sank into a tranquil sleep, which lasted through the night. In the morning she was able to give a connected account of herself. Her name was Mary Danton. Her father and brother, enticed by the

glowing descriptions they had heard of the beauty and fertility of the West, had joined a small party of adventurers in quest of homes and happiness in that wild region. She had accompanied them, full of delightful anticipations of the romance of the flowering wilderness, where Nature herself seemed to minister to the wants of man in an eminent degree. They plunged boldly into the solitudes of Minnesota. They were charmed with the rich soil, the noble forests, the beautiful rivers and lakes of that country. Their hopes were doomed to sad disappointment. Toward the close of a sunny day, they were attacked by a party of Indians. The woods resounded with frightful yells. Mary Danton was mounted upon a young and spirited horse, which was terrified by the savage din, and dashed madly away with its fair rider. Her steed bore her far before his strength was spent; and when his speed at length abated, she was many miles from the scene of the onset, and irretrievably lost. Night, too, dark and lonely, came to add to the distress of her situation. Dismounting from her now panting and trembling horse, she experienced for the first time the absolute terror of complete isolation. She cried aloud for help; her clear voice rang through the vast solitude. The far-off shriek of a panther answered her. She did not repeat the experiment. For companionship, she kept close to the horse; there was comfort in his dumb presence. She held him by the bridle all night, and was glad to see him gradually recover from his fright, and devour the foliage within his reach.

In the morning, she led him to a stream, when, having drank eagerly, he threw back his ears, whinnied, and cropped the tender verdure on the bank. How it gladdened her to see him evince these signs of returning strength and spirit! She mounted, and gave him the rein; but the animal was as much at fault as herself. She knew not which way to direct him, and as is generally the case with lost persons, went exactly wrong. She trusted her friends would find her, if they survived, or she should by accident discover them. But this expectation gradually grew less and less. For three days she wandered helplessly, subsisting upon such wild berries as chance threw in her way. On the fourth morning, she found herself too weak to pursue and mount her horse, which had wandered off in the night. It was at the close of that day that she was discovered by Bernard and the mountaineer.

CHAPTER XI.

INQUIRIES FOR NATTIE.

Ralph Quimby returned to the lodge where he had left Nathalia, in a temper by no means desirable. He felt no little doubt in regard to the influence Stratton might ultimately exercise upon his purposes. He could make use of him, at present, it was true; but he felt an uncomfortable fear of his resentment when he should find that he had been trifled with, and used merely as an instrument to forward his—Ralph's—schemes.

He entered the lodge.

"Nathalia!" No one answered.

"Asleep, I s'pose," he said.

It was dim in the lodge, and the blinding glare of the sunshine was upon Ralph's eyes; every object was blurred for a moment.

"Get up, Nattie! It isn't good for you to be so stupid."

There was no reply. He approached the couch and stooped over it.

"Not here; goe out."

He now observed that the fire had burned out, and the brands were lying cold and black.

A suspicion crossed his mind. He hastened from the hut and called her.

"Wandering round as girls always are! Fainted away somewhere, perhaps."

He walked around the lodge several times, widening the diameter of the circle each time.

No Nattie, of course. His suspicions took a positive character.

"Taken flight!" he muttered. "Fled! Wants to break her fetters. But what can she do? It is plain enough; she hasn't strength to go far; I shall find her somewhere within half a mile circuit."

Ralph paused to reflect again. His face grew suddenly troubled and angry.

"Perhaps she's had help! That young Ross may have been here. Would she go with him, I wonder? Yes, with the devil, to get away from me! If he's the man, I have a bound to scent him—one that will bite as well as bark. I'll unleash Nat Stratton. There was never a

dog that could follow as he can. Let me see"—he coaxed his head by putting his hand on it—"there's Whitelaw. It wouldn't be strange. That might mar all in a moment, or accomplish all. I hope not—I hope not! I must know for a certainty. I must go to the hut. I'll soon settle it. Let 'em meddle, if they like. They'll get tired of it before they've done!"

The miner clenched his hand and shook it wrathfully.

"People'll better let me alone; they'd better not stir up the depths of evil that are in me. I can't help being what I am. If I was born half-man and half-devil, whose fault is it? I'll live out what's in me, and who can do more? My hatred of him has reigned paramount for years. Every additional year has added to its bitterness. Love and jealousy kindled a hell in my breast, and it has burned with a steady flame. Away, remorse! away, conscience! Ralph Quimby will die as he has lived, in the scorching, withering fires of his hate!"

He hurried into the lodge for his rifle and ammunition, then started for the hut. On the way he again encountered Stratton, who related, with many exaggerations, the particulars of his encounter with Ross.

"An awkward affair," said Ralph. "But no matter; it won't be worth while for you to trouble yourself any more about it."

"Why not?" demanded Stratton, gruffly.

"Because Nathalia's gone. She has fled like a bird that leaves no trail."

"Come! don't try to fool me, Ralph. I know grain from chaff, I allow. Don't stir me up ag'in. You've got a new scheme in your head, I s'pose?"

Stratton glared at Quimby ominously.

"Cease to growl at me, Nat! I don't care to see your teeth. If you *must* bite, don't fasten on me. The girl's gone; whether alone, or with some one, I don't know; but gone she is. Hunt her, if you want to. After her as quick as you please, but don't harm her. Bring her to me as you find her—if you find her. There—that's all! I'm going to my cabin, now, to see if she's there. I don't know what kind of a reception I shall get from the people who've taken possession of it, but I'll run the risk. Perhaps they've gone and taken the girl with them."

"So she's really missin'?" muttered Stratton. "I thought it was gammon, at first, but I see you're in earnest. Lead on, Ralph; I'll follow. I've gone into this thing, and I won't turn back."

"Come along, then."

It was not a long walk to the hut. The door was ajar; Ralph pushed it open and went in. Neil Travis was sitting on the side of the bed, with his head bandaged. Whitelaw was simmering some kind of medicine over a slow fire. He raised his eyes when Ralph and his comrade entered, but kept at his work. The former was silent an instant, struggling with an emotion that was striving to make itself visible upon his face.

"I hope you're comfortable here!" he said, ironically. "It's no great crime, I s'pose, to drive a man out of his house!"

"Not quite equal to murder," answered Whitelaw, quietly.

"I had hoped," said Neil Travis, "that you had left this part of the country, to save trouble. I wonder that you dare show yourself here again!"

"When you grow older, you won't let things surprise you," returned Ralph, with cool sarcasm.

"But the crime?" remonstrated Travis.

"Pooh, boy! there has been no crime committed. You're alive, a'n't ye? If you involve yourself in a quarrel and get the worst on't, I a'n't to blame for it, am I?"

"We shall see!" answered Travis, moodily. "I'm no idle boaster, but what I say, I mean."

"The less you say and the less you mean, the better!" answered Quimby, flashing up with his old fierceness. "But I didn't come here to quarrel with any man," he added, quelling himself. "I have come for my niece."

Whitelaw turned from his employment and looked at Ralph. His piercing eyes made the man involuntarily step back. The gaze was long and earnest. Some old, painful memory seemed to float dimly through Whitelaw's consciousness; he could not divine its origin, nor why it came then. He felt as if an enemy had found him, or a great evil was impending. Minds disciplined by suffering often have such intimations.

"What did you say?"

Ralph was awed; the guilty are apt to be. Did Whitelaw see anything familiar in his features? Had not time utterly changed him? It should have done so. Years of vicissitude and the constant fermentation of bad passions had certainly obliterated all traces of his former self. That thought gave him courage.

"I could not have believed this of you," he answered, in a voice artfully melancholy. "I trusted you; I set you to guard my treasure; but you have stolen it from me. Where is she?"

"I don't know what you mean."

Whitelaw's voice was steady, but his expression was anxious.

"I'll look into this room, if I'm allowed liberty on my own premises," replied Ralph, following up the advantage that he had gained.

"Look under the bed!" added Neil, sarcastically. "You'll find blood there! But not the last drop; *that's* in here."

Neil tapped himself lightly upon the breast.

"In here!" he repeated, with a ghastly smile.

"Be sure you keep it there!" muttered Stratton.

"I've kept it through many dangers. Ay, when a hundred throats clamored for it!"

Ralph opened the little door and glanced into Nathalia's room.

"Don't think I'm disappointed in not finding her here. She's farther off, no doubt," he said, shrinking uneasily from the gaze of Travis.

"I see," said Whitelaw. "Nathalia is missing, and you accuse me of being instrumental in her flight. You are wrong."

"And yet you knew it," retorted Ralph, suspiciously.

"Not till this visit."

"You'll believe him!" sneered Stratton.

"Our business," rejoined Ralph, "is not here." Then to Whitelaw: "Where are your two friends?"

"Hunting in the forest," Whitelaw answered.

"How long have they been gone?"

"About two hours."

"Two hours!" repeated Ralph. "Those are our men, Stratton. I hope, Mr. Whitelaw, that I sha'n't have reason to regret that you saw my niece. I am loth to think you base enough to harm that poor child."

"I wish I could think the same of you," said Travis.

Ralph threw upon the young man a menacing look.

"Eyes can't kill, though they may *look* murder. Knives and hammers are more dangerous!" retorted Travis.

"Be quiet," admonished Whitelaw. "Excitement will harm you."

"I am calmer than he. Any leech in the world will tell you that my pulse has a healthier beat."

Ralph and Nat Stratton left the hut slowly and silently.

"He's dangerous!" muttered Ralph, when they were out of hearing. "I'm afraid of his eyes! I'd rather have a panther after me than Neil Travis."

CHAPTER XII.

THE COPPER-MINE.

The miners retired from the hut in much perplexity. Ralph was uncertain upon whom to charge the abduction of Nathalia; while Stratton was suspicious not only of Ross and Whitelaw, but of Ralph, also. The latter was subtle, and he knew not what new project he might have conceived. Retiring to a convenient distance, after taking counsel together, they watched the cabin through the dim and silent hours of the night. They did not sleep; their busy thoughts kept them wakeful. The absentees did not return; which circumstance confirmed Ralph in the idea that they had exercised an agency in the disappearance of Nattie. They then went to Whitelaw's lodge, ate a hurried breakfast, and commenced what they intended should be a thorough search for the missing one. But how different were the motives of the two men! Could they have looked into each other's hearts, they would have quarreled on the spot, or separated, perhaps, to meet no more.

They endeavored to discover some trail to guide them; but, after hours spent in the attempt, abandoned it, and struck off in a northerly direction, trusting that chance might lead them where their skill as woodsmen had failed.

They trod the grand old forest, but the sublimity of its solitude did not touch them. The emotions that good men feel in close communion with Nature, did not visit them. The selfish

passions that actuated them left no room for the charm of beauty.

Late in the afternoon, they perceived a smoke curling lightly above the tree tops—a slender column almost as white as the clouds. They continued their way with renewed courage. When within a few rods of the spot where the smoke went up, they advanced cautiously. Creeping to the margin of a small opening, they saw a camp that had evidently been constructed hastily, for temporary occupancy. They could see no one. By-and-by, Kid Kerly came out, with his rifle, and after addressing a few words to some one within, went away.

"I think," whispered Ralph, "we shall find Nathalia!"

"Let's settle it at once," answered the other, impatiently.

"Be patient!" replied Ralph. "If she is in the camp, she is not alone. The gold-hunter is with her, doubtless."

"We're armed! There's two of us to one. Why should we lose such a good chance for a quarrel? You will charge him with stealin' your niece; he'll fire up; then the pullin' of a trigger'll end all."

"I'm afraid not. Remember Kid Kerly. Would you like to have a man on your track that can follow a trail in the night better than you can in the day-time, with blood on your hands, too?" returned Ralph.

"He'll have the same chance to dog us, with or without blood."

"Ay, but he'll have no right to harm me for taking away my niece. Do you want those terrible sights to cover ye? I don't! But it's a kind o' work that suits him. If we rub out one, the other must keep him company."

"Let it be *both*, then! We can shoot 'em from here as easy as we can breathe, throw their bodies into a deserted mine, git rid of two enemies, and take the girl to some distant and unfrequented spot where she'll be safe from everybody but them that want her. That's *my* way!"

"It's a desperate plan," said Ralph, shaking his head, "but will do if nothing better offers. We'll wait here till dark and take our chance."

"I hear the murmur of voices!" asserted Stratton. "There's no mistake about this matter. 'Twas a lucky chance that brought us here."

Ralph Quimby had some difficulty in restraining the impatience of Stratton; but by arguments and threats, prevailed on him to be quiet till the sun went down and twilight spread its soft shadows over the Ten Miles Trace.

Half an hour later, Bernard Ross came out of the little camp, listened, and seemed uneasy. Just then there was a rifle-shot in the woods at his right. The miners heard him say: "It is Kerly; he has brought down a deer, probably. I will go and help him bring it in. I won't leave you but a few minutes."

The young man left the camp, with his rifle in his hand. The rustling of his footsteps in the leaves could be heard for some time, gradually receding; when they had died quite away, the miners arose and approached the camp. The fire within had burned low and was sending up a black smoke. The night, too, had set in dark. Ralph was in advance and rushed in hastily. A slight scream and the rustle of a dress, told him where to find the supposed object of his search. In a moment he had caught a female form in his arms and was bearing it away. The terror inspired by this sudden entry, acting instantly upon the weak frame of Mary Danton, deprived her of the power of resistance and the use of her voice. Before she had recovered from the shock of this rude visitation, she was in the dark recesses of the forest, encircled by two arms of iron firmness. She tried to scream, but a faint and gasping sound, only, came from her lips.

Ralph stopped, tore a small woolen scarf from her neck, and bound it tightly over her mouth. To question, to call for help, was now impossible. A sickly dread was upon her. What horrible fate was before her? Why this violence? Whither were they bearing her? She could dimly discern a face in the darkness; she could not remember of having seen it before; its features, she imagined, were frightfully sinister. She would infinitely rather have been lost again in the great wilderness, than to be where she was, with that stern visage bending over her. She struggled faintly to free herself. He placed her upon her feet.

"You can walk, if you want to, but you must walk fast," said Ralph. He took her arm within his, and she endeavored to keep pace with him; but her limbs soon failed, when Stratton seized

the other arm and the poor girl was literally dragged between them.

"Don't be obstinate! You went fast enough when you ran away, I'll be bound! Girls that run away must suffer a little. But you needn't pant and tremble so, child; we are not going to eat you. You'll live through it, I dare say!" said Ralph, with his habitual sneer.

"She seems uncommon weak! Should think she'd been fastin' for the last three days," remarked Stratton, who observed that she hung heavily upon his arm.

"It's a way that women have. They can faint and cry when they please, and be as helpless as infants. Yes, I understand the nature of 'em, and Nattie's nature in particular."

By this time poor Mary Danton's strength was quite exhausted; the two men were forced to carry her by turns. The darkness was intense, but they appeared to know where they were, and went forward without much difficulty, governing their course, in part, by the moss upon the trees. They struck a path, at length, when their progress was attended with less exertion. When they stopped, Mary Danton was a helpless weight in their arms. They laid her upon the ground, and were busy some time.

"There's no other place," said Ralph, in answer to a remonstrance from Stratton. "If there was, we'd make use of it. Here we can secrete her where no one will find her; she can't run away, either."

"But the secret?" said Stratton.

"She knows it, already; and she isn't one to tattle without strong reasons," returned Ralph.

"Right! Is the ladder ready? It's a delicate job to git her down there, I reckon."

"Yes, it requires a strong arm and a steady foot. Will you try it, Nat? I'll go down first and steady the ladder, and see that it's placed firmly at the bottom."

"Go! I'll carry her safe, or be dashed to pieces with her!"

Mary Danton had revived enough to hear the last remarks; as may be imagined, they sent a strange thrill of terror to her heart. Ralph appeared to sink into the earth. Nat Stratton took a stout strap from his waist and buckled it around Miss Danton, then passed his arm through it and about her. He moved carefully. She was conscious that he was descending a ladder into a space of inky blackness. As he went lower and lower, she felt the frail structure swinging and vibrating with their united weight. She expected, momentarily, to be precipitated into a horrible abyss. The man's words rang in her ears: "I'll carry her safe, or be dashed to pieces with her!"

The ladder sprang and swayed like a pendulum. She heard the ruffian's heart beat fearfully, as he held his breath, and groped his perilous footing with a firm and determined will.

The thought to struggle, destroy his balance, and involve him and herself in one common fate, flashed through her mind. But it was too horrible to be put in practice; she instinctively shrank from such a catastrophe, and listened with keen intensity, expecting to hear the frail support crushing beneath Stratton's feet. A few moments of unspeakable suspense, and the dangerous passage was accomplished. She stood on solid earth. She heard Stratton breathing hard, like one who has made a great effort.

"This way," said Ralph, supporting her. "You can step without fear; the worst is over. It isn't so bad a place as you may think."

Ralph guided and half carried her some distance in the deepest darkness; but it was obvious that he was treading familiar ground.

"Light a lamp, comrade," he added. "We've been in darkness long enough. A hundred lamps wouldn't betray us here."

Stratton fumbled and stumbled about a short time, and then the rays of a lamp fell upon the three.

"Look at her!" exclaimed Stratton, nearly dropping the lamp.

Ralph Quimby turned slowly, and saw, not Nathalia, but a face he had never seen before. He relinquished his hold upon her, and fell back a few paces.

"The devil!" said Ralph Quimby.

"A hundred devils!" vociferated Stratton.

"A strange mistake!" added Ralph, staring at the pale face of Mary Danton.

"An infernal blunder!" cried the miner. "And I've risked my neck for that tattered witch! By heavens, Ralph! I'm half inclined to believe you knew it."

"You were always a suspicious fool!" retorted Ralph, angrily. "The thing's happened, and we must make the best of it."

Ralph took the scarf from the girl's mouth, and said, roughly:

"Speak! Who are you?"

"Mary Danton," she murmured.

"Why didn't you tell us so before?" growled Stratton.

"For the very good reason that she couldn't," said Ralph, coolly. "You'd find it hard to speak, yourself, with your mouth tied up."

"What shall we do with her?" Stratton asked, moodily.

Ralph looked at her again, and perceived that she was fair. Her hair was dark, soft, and redundant; her eyes black and brilliant; her mouth delicately sweet and feminine; her figure wonderfully like Nathalia's, graceful, and agreeable to the eye. Something about her touched his heart. His gaze ran over her person. Her hands and half-bare arms were white, but wounded by the rude contact of bushes. Her torn garments, too, awakened his curiosity. She had on her feet moccasins of green deer-skin, which bore marks of having been recently and hastily made; they were the handiwork of Kid Kerby.

"What shall we do with her?" repeated Stratton, impatiently.

"Let her alone," answered Ralph, curtly.

"But our secret?" added Stratton, raising a significant finger.

"I'll be responsible for it and her," Ralph replied, quietly, yet with decision.

"The devil you will!" snarled the other.

"What if I don't choose to agree to it?"

"You will!" said Ralph, with peculiar emphasis.

"I don't know! I don't know!" retorted the miner, with a dissatisfied air.

"Nathalia is my niece!" rejoined Ralph, with a magnetic tone and look. He then added, addressing the young woman: "Mary Danton, you shall not be harmed. You are as safe here as in the camp from which we have, by mistake, taken you."

There was something in Ralph's heart; it was not pity, neither could it be called love. He had formed a purpose, which was momentarily growing stronger.

"Take me back! take me back!" she said, imploringly, leaning against the damp wall of the mine.

"Wait till to-morrow," replied Ralph. "Come this way and sit upon these blankets. Comrade, start a fire. Don't look moody and sullen. I swear to you it shall all be right! Think of Nattie!"

"Think of her!" he retorted, fiercely. "I can't forget her. 'Tis the thought of her that makes me miserable. You are all leagued against me. I am put off from day to day. I'll rebel against all of ye, by-and-by. I'm no boy, Ralph—I'm no boy! I shall kill somebody, or go mad!"

The miner clenched his fists, and drew his face into an expression of pain and passion. He suffered.

Ralph laid his hands upon the man's shoulders, looked steadily into his burning eyes, but said not a word. Stratton trembled, moaned like an animal, and turned away, quelled and subdued by the singular ascendancy of his companion.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISSING.

Bernard met Kerly returning to the camp with the choicest portions of a buck upon his shoulder. They approached the sylvan shelter, conversing cheerfully. The mountaineer threw his burden down at the entrance, and seeing that the fire was nearly out, placed the smouldering brands together, and fanned them into a flame with his breath. The reviving blaze sent a tremulous light around. Kerly's eyes rested on the deserted couch of Mary Danton. He was crouching over the brands; but upon making this discovery, slowly raised himself, with his hands braced upon his knees, brushed the matted hair from his eyes, staring incredulously at the vacant spot. He seemed at length convinced that it was no optical illusion, and called Bernard, who was outside. He came in at once.

"Gone!" said the mountaineer.

Bernard looked around, and perceived that this laconic announcement referred to Mary Danton.

"She cannot be far off, I think," he answered, in a tone of anxiety that belied his words. "Miss Danton! Miss Danton!" he added, raising his voice.

Kid Kerly took a blazing fagot from the fire, and examined the ground within the little area.

"You'll have to call louder'n that!" he said,

throwing his torch upon the fire. "Here are strange tracks. Things have been disturbed some'at. There are signs of a slight struggle; somebody's been here, and the gal's carried off."

"Indians, perhaps?" suggested Bernard.

"Don't I know a buffler from a hoss?" replied Kid, tartly. "No red-skins have been here to-night. This is the work o' people whose skins ought to be white."

"Her friends may have found her and taken her away," returned Bernard, dubiously, for he felt that the supposition was not probable.

"You don't believe that yourself," responded the mountaineer. "If her friends had come across her, they wouldn't carried her off this dark night, 'thout stoppin' to thank them as had saved her life. That's an absurdity, lad! Don't go to talk to Kid Kerly in that way. Wah!"

"The miners?"

"That's got more common sense in it. It's jes' sich a piece o' work as they'd like. We'll 'tend to their case in the mornin'."

"In the morning!" repeated Bernard. "Can we do nothing to-night? The poor girl may be in terrible danger, and it's our duty to follow at once."

"How you goin' to foller a trail in this inky darkness? You can't see your hand afore ye; how, then, discern a human footstep?"

"True!" answered the young man. "But we can certainly go out and search in the immediate vicinity of the camp, and call her name."

"We'll do it," said Kerby, "for the sake o' showin' our good-will; but nothin' won't come of it. Listen to what I say. Natur' is to me a book; I find characters on the ground which I can read better'n I can print. The airtu don't often lie to me. When a foot presss the sile, there it is, and I can tell, sure as shootin', whether it's a white or a red foot. People can't come nor go 'thout leavin' some writin' that I can understand. Well, there's writin' on this little bit of sile, that tells me the gal's carried off. If an individual was to come and say that he seed her carried away, it wouldn't reduce it to a greater sartinty in my own mind. You hear that—don't ye? Well, that's Kid Kerly's say. Wah!" The mountaineer and Bernard went out and walked several times around the camp, calling at intervals the name of Mary Danton, then returned to wait for morning to solve the mystery. In the night, to the chagrin of Kid, there was a heavy fall of rain.

"It is all in their favor," he said; "It will wash out their tracks and straighten up the bushes. If it hadn't been for this, I'd follered 'em to a dead sartinty. You might a put it down as a sure thing; but now we must trust, in a measure, to luck. I'm sorry, because I wanted to show you how to take a trail, and the way I question the airtu and the grass, the leaves, the sticks and twigs, when I want information."

"One would suppose, answered Bernard, musingly, "that peace and quietude ought to prevail in these solitudes, instead of violence and the selfish passions of men. To me, there is sacredness in a spot where we are brought, as it were, face to face with Nature."

"You never went trappin' on the upper branches of Missouri, nor slept in your blanket beside the Big Red. The fact is, there's evil and devilry wherever you find the human shape. Where folks a'n't held in restraint, their true natur's are apt to break out. I could tell ye lots of instances in p'int, both among red-skins and white-skins. There's love, jealousy, and revenge in the wilderness as well's out on't. May I never shoot plum' centre ag'in if there isn't!"

The two men were up with the sun. The grass and foliage were laden with water. They waited impatiently till the warm rays had evaporated the glistening drops. Kid Kerly then went to work in earnest to discover the trail of the miners, and was thus engaged, when they were unexpectedly joined by Whitelaw.

"I was seeking you," he said, abruptly.

"Have you seen Nathalia?"

He looked at Bernard; the latter thought distrustfully. He shook his head.

"I have seen the man Quimby," added Whitelaw, "who informed me that she was missing. Indeed, he charged me with having aided in her flight."

It was Bernard's turn to look at Whitelaw, and question his features. If Nathalia had fled, or escaped from Ralph, he was inclined to the opinion that this man, who brought the intelligence, had exercised an agency in her disappearance. This thought came upon him of a sudden, and with force.

"To me," said Bernard, after a moment's re-

flection, "everything relating to the young woman, since the time when she was snatched from me on the night of the storm, is an utter mystery. As you are aware, I searched for her in vain. If you discovered her, you have prudently kept the secret to yourself."

The young man's manner was somewhat sarcastic.

"You forget," returned Whitelaw, with a slight frown, "that we have not met since the morning following the strange incidents at the miner's cabin."

"True!" replied Bernard. "I had overlooked that fact."

"I was more fortunate in my search than you," continued Whitelaw. "I found Nathalia!"

"Where?" asked Bernard, quickly.

"Not far from the miner's cabin, in a hut that I have sometimes occupied. The poor child was in an evil plight, sadly in need of a friend. I sat by her through a long night, and, though but an awkward nurse, did my best to make her comfortable."

A secret feeling of jealousy crept into Bernard's breast. This man had discovered Nathalia; he had had the inestimable privilege of ministering to her while she was ill, and in need of a friend. He had sat by her side; he had watched her troubled slumbers, and placed the cup of sympathy to her fevered lips. He had whit hairs; but what of that? His face and expression gave the lie to them. His features were still fresh and pleasing, with a certain stamp of nobility upon them; while his manners were easy, and well calculated to inspire a young girl with confidence.

Whitelaw watched the varying countenance of the young man. Did the fluctuations of color betray guilt or anxiety?

"Was the miner with his niece on the occasion you speak of?" Bernard inquired.

"Without doubt! I need not tell you that there is little sympathy between them. His presence is a continual terror to her. You should have seen her. She had evidently been in great peril, as her words, manner, and soiled garments testified."

Whitelaw did not turn his gaze from Bernard while speaking.

"She's allers in danger, in my 'pinion, when she's with Ralph Quimby," said the mountaineer. "The critter wouldn't mind throwin' her down a copper-mine, if she didn't please him. Wouldn't trust that man out o' my sight. Don't I know? Ha'n't I seen all sorts o' human natur's, from white through all the grades of colors up to red, yaller, and black? I tell ye I want to look at that varmint through the hind sights! I'd shoot plum' centre, or I'd never squint along a rifle-barrel ag'in!"

Whitelaw glanced significantly at the mountaineer.

"You haven't tramped the Northern solitudes for nothing," he observed, approvingly.

"I know a blue fox from a red!" grunted Kerly.

"You appeared to be looking for a trail when I came upon you," pursued Whitelaw.

"Well, I'll allow that's what I's doin'! We've had our sheer of adventur's since we left the hut o' that minin' individual down yender. We run afoul of a gal jest on the edges of another world, all on 'count o' starvation and wanderin' about in a lost condition. But she'd got well nigh through her travels, and was too weak to put one foot afore t'other. We fell upon her like good Samaritans. A few spoonfuls of the *habituals* brought her out of her swoond that she went into at the sight of us, and good nussin' and broth set her on her walkers ag'in, as 'twere. See that little camp, don't ye? Tisn't much of a structur', is it? Didn't take us long to build it, though. But I's goin' to say, that while we's out arter game last night—Bernard, here, wasn't gone more'n half an an hour, all told—somebody come and stole that gal away! In my mind, that copper-diggin' critter had a hand in it. He'll find a hole, sometime, six feet towards two p'int's o' the compass, and six feet perpendicular, that won't be a copper-mine, by a long shot!"

Whitelaw heard this story without the least perceptible surprise. If his face expressed anything, it was doubt. "Was not this tale, in part, made for the occasion?" was a query that passed almost involuntarily through his mind. Was not this starving girl Nathalia? Was this abduction of which Kid complained anything more than the simple truth that Ralph had traced and recovered his niece? He turned to Bernard.

"You do not speak, young man?" he remarked.

"Our friend has saved me the trouble," replied Ross.

"And very ingeniously, too! Had this poor female waif a name?"

Whitelaw glanced from one to the other, to see if this question was provided for.

"I never seed a critter without one," answered the mountaineer, promptly; "and this young woman wasn't so so unfortunite as to lose hers when she lost her pretty self. Her name was Mary Danton. Nice name. Wah!"

"It will be hard finding the trail," returned Whitelaw, after a pause. "The recent rain has washed away probably."

Whitelaw's thoughts were now concealed by that impenetrable mask of quietude which his face usually wore.

"Gentlemen, I wish you success," he added. "I am looking for Nathalia."

"And I, also, shall seek her," responded Bernard, instantly.

Were these two men jealous of each other? Was an incipient dislike to Whitelaw developing within him? Had he aught to fear in the way of rivalry from a man with gray hairs? He could not tell; woman's nature was such a mystery; she had so many whims and caprices, and was so anomalous in her love.

"Should you find her," added Whitelaw, presently, "do not forget that she is friendless, helpless, innocent, and her young life embittered by neglect and persecution."

"I know what is due to her sex," said Bernard, coldly.

"We a'n't turned niggur yet, nor I don't believe we shall in a hurry! You don't s'pose this youngster's like them copper-diggin' critters, do ye? If I thought he was, I'd shoot him, plum' centre, in less nor a minute. Skin me like a beaver, if I wouldn't!" exclaimed the mountaineer, with warmth.

"I know you for an honest fellow, Kid Kerly. Follow the trail of truth, and we sha'n't quarrel," replied Whitelaw.

"I never travel the tangled path of deception. I haven't got two faces, like a thiev'n' Rapaho, who says 'Friend' in one corner of his mouth, and 'Steal' in the other! Wah!"

Whitelaw lingered a moment, as if there was something more that he would say, then thoughtfully went his way.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAKE SHORE.

Bernard Ross left Kid Kerly diligently and patiently endeavoring to find the trail of the miners. He walked into the forest, meditating on what he had heard concerning Nathalia, and the singular deportment of Whitelaw. He was too much interested in the girl not to be affected by the intelligence of her disappearance. Of the half-hermit, half-misanthrope, who had brought the news, he felt not a little distrust. He perceived that Whitelaw was attracted to Nattie. He recalled, as he strolled onward, the particulars of their first meeting at Ralph's cabin; that his gaze on that occasion was often fixed upon her with wonder and admiration, providing he—Bernard—were an apt student in human nature. The favorable impression that the man had made at that time, was rapidly wearing off; while fear and suspicion were taking the place of his former convictions. It seemed to him that Whitelaw's feelings toward Ralph Quimby had changed, he having scarcely referred to that individual during the recent interview; while at the cabin, he had talked of law and punishment in connection with the miner.

Bernard Ross had a strong, resolute will. He was wanting neither in firmness nor decision. Born and reared in one of the border towns, he had early learned self-trust. He felt equally at home in the clearings and in the wilderness. There was little or no restraint upon his actions; he was at liberty to go and come unquestioned. His friends relied upon his character and judgment, and believed him able to take care of himself, and make his way in the world. His frequent and long absences created no alarm. But he had strangely forgotten the object of this, his latest pilgrimage to the lake. Since seeing Nathalia, gold-hunting had become a secondary consideration; the secret of her life interested him infinitely more. She was the treasure he now aspired to possess. As is the case with most young men, when they come under the influence of woman, he was fully assured that he should be miserable without her.

So he pushed on, dreaming day-dreams of Nattie of the Woods. He resolved to find her. He would search the world over to discover where she was hidden! He would slow-track Whitelaw; he would slow-track the miners, and every one who had been brought into relation with her during her isolated life in the Ten Miles Trace. His mind teeming with images of this kind, he was unconscious that he walked fast and far, and that the wind had risen, was scattering the leaves, and whistling through the branches. The dash and roar of waters admonished him that he had reached the lake. He sat down upon the shore and saw the billows driven by the winds from the eastern toward the western border. He watched them chasing each other till they were lost in the distance. They reminded of hope, that ever continually rises in the human breast, moving and billowing on to the very portals of the grave.

Had Bernard been less absorbed, he might perhaps have heard some one approaching him cautiously; but he was in a mood far too dreamy for such practicalities. He did not know exactly what happened, but it appeared to him that he was half annihilated. He fell forward upon his face, with part of his person in the water. There was an instant in which he lost consciousness of the sunlight, the world, and himself. But it was a momentary blank. A confused sense of a blow upon the head, was the first awakening that he had, and that was very dim. He heard voices, and recognized them. Although he lay with his eyes closed, his body motionless and apparently without life, his mind was sufficiently active to take in the startling truth that he had fallen into the hands of Nat Stratton and Ralph Quimby.

They decided what was to be done with him. Not a word escaped him. They talked of the matter as coolly as if it were no more than the killing of a deer. The trunk of a pine tree was lying on the shore, partly imbedded in the sand. They rolled it down the bank into the water. How plainly he heard them tugging at it! Stratton took him by the feet and dragged him along to it; then Ralph assisted to place him upon it, face upward. His arms were drawn downward beneath the log and secured there by a cord passed from one wrist to the other. His limbs were similarly disposed, and the whole body was firmly lashed to the trunk.

Bernard was conscious of all this, and his feelings may be imagined.

"A long voyage is before him," said Stratton. "This stick is pretty well water-logged, and 'll sink afore it reaches the middle of the lake. The wind is fair; blowin' a regular gale. He'll be carried far awtixt this and mornin'."

"He'll never strike me again with the butt of a pistol!" muttered Quimby.

"Nor shoot me again in the neck; nor come between me and Nattie!"

"Push him off," said Ralph. "Let's see how he floats. If he's picked up anywhere, it's likely to be a hundred miles from here, if this wind continues."

Stratton gave the tree a push with his foot, and it moved from the shore.

"Look!" he cried, suddenly. "His cheeks flush! There's life in him! Hadn't I better send a bullet through his head?"

"On no account! Let him come round, if he will. I'd like to have him know whose good-will has given him this drift upon the lake," answered Ralph, with a malignant laugh. "The world would call that murder, I suppose," he added, as if talking to himself; "but it's only a blow and a voyage on a log. See! he moves his head. He's alive! nobody can say that we killed him. He will die by water—not by the hand of man."

"That's logic, I reckon!" returned Stratton, with a shrug. "But in my 'pinion, it's poor logic. I give him a blow with a club, and it was no love-pat; Ralph Quimby; I struck with a will; and there was hatred and murder in my heart! You encouraged me to it, Ralph, you know you did. But I'm mad. The gal has driven me out o' my senses. You've led me on like a devil. They say," he continued, laying his hand on Quimby's shoulder, "that a person never has any rest after such a deed. How is it with you?"

"Don't talk!" retorted Quimby, shaking off Stratton's hand. "I don't know; I never killed anybody."

"There was Niel Travis?" said the other.

"He's alive!" was the gruff reply.

"Ay, but you consented. You did more than consent; in your mind, there was a real murder."

"What do you want?" asked Ralph angrily. "What are you coming at? Do you begin to whine so soon?"

"There's somethin' burnin', burnin', in here. I want to know what 'tis—that's all."

"The conscience of a coward!" sneered Ralph. "Let us begone."

"Not yet! A horrible spell makes me linger. Look! he lifts his head and turns it partially toward us. The tree floats lighter than I thought 'twould. The top on't is dried by the sun."

"Come away! come away!" answered Ralph, pulling him by the sleeve. "Think of her."

"I've thought of her till I've lost my reason, as I shall lose my soul. But he's out of the way—out of the way! There's a devilish joy in that thought."

Stratton clenched both his hands and shook them toward the lake with wild energy.

"Drift on! drift on!" he shouted. "You have lost Nattie—you have lost all!"

Quimby took him by the arm and led him away.

"You act like a child!" he said, fretfully. "I thought you had nerves."

"I had, once; but love and hate have consumed them. You are a devil, Ralph Quimby! I feel that you deceive me."

"This is folly! Look at me; see how calm I am. There—come along!"

Stratton raised his head, met Ralph's eyes, shivered, and said, in a subdued voice:

"Go on—go on, Ralph—I follow."

The men left the shore without looking behind them.

Meantime the wind drove Bernard out into lake. The waves dashed over him; they beat pitilessly upon his face; they moaned and threatened around him; they whispered his fate in his ears. He could not but abandon all thoughts of rescue; every probability was against him. Hope did not leave him utterly. Perhaps the wind might change and cast him back upon the shore, where he might be found by a humane fellow-creature.

The waters heaved and swelled. He struggled to wrench his hands free of the cords that bound them; but every effort gave him pain. He looked upward; he saw the infinite arch of the sky, and the clouds whirling rapidly across it. The heavens had never appeared so grand, and the sun so glorious in its brightness; its great red disk looked like a world of itself, and he grieved to part with it forever. He had seen it for years, but never had it seemed so much like a friend as now. It is much to die and leave the sunlight forever. He was drifting from Nathalia, too, as well as from life. All bonds were to be severed, and new relations with a new world commenced. It was a solemn thought.

He clung to life. He was unwilling to leave an existence in which he might be happy with Nathalia. He renewed his attempts to free his hands, and abandoned them from pain and exhaustion. A dread and a horror was upon him. The waves, he thought, howled after him in very malice. The support to which he was fastened, was tossed about like a cork. It was flung from billow to billow; it was now submerged, and now dancing on the surface.

Bernard grew wild; he shouted till he was hoarse; the winds and waters mocked his voice. Weak and half-drowned, he surged silently and hopelessly on. A certain degree of consciousness remained, but it fluctuated dreamily, like the billows that bore him.

CHAPTER XV.

OWEN AND HIS WHISPERER.

"How the wind blows!" said Owen. "Do you know what makes the wind blow, Queen Nattie? There's a fellow that runs beside me, that knows. The whisperer could tell you, if he had a mind; but he don't talk with everybody."

"Let us go and see the waves beat on the shore," replied Nattie. "The lake must be greatly agitated. Are you not afraid that it will shake your kingdom, Owen?"

"The greatest storms don't stir it; it's built very strong, Nattie. Come, Tawny, you may go and see the waters tumble."

Nathalia and Owen, followed by the little Indian girl, walked down to the shore. The lake was in violent commotion.

"It won't blow long in this way," said Owen. "The wind'll change soon, and push the waters the other way."

"How do you know?" asked Nattie.

"Ah, ha! you want to find out my secret, do you? See, the waves chase each other! I like that! I wish they were bigger, and the wind blew harder, and the sky was burstin', and blazin' with thunder and lightnin'! That would make a merry time of it."

Nathalia gazed silently at the troubled waters. A natural feeling of sublimity stirred her soul. There was a grandeur in the turmoil of that inland sea. Tawny sat down on a stone, and there was neither wonder nor fear on her swarthy face.

Owen walked to and fro, smiling, muttering, and stretching his hands toward the hurrying waters. There was a lull; the wind suddenly changed, as the youth had predicted.

"I told you so!" he said, looking triumphantly at Nattie.

"The wind is an inconstant thing; it never knows its own mind. It never'll be any different, never!"

"Owen," answered Nathalia, shading her eyes with her hand, "I think I can see an object drifting this way."

"It wouldn't be strange, Queen Nattie! A good many things come to my kingdom when the wind blows. The wind is a great friend of mine; it brings me lots of firewood."

"Look, Owen, look! Your eyes are sharp; see if you can make it out," she added, earnestly.

"Looks like a tree," replied the youth. "It's comin' to the island for firewood. I'll set Tawny to choppin' it with my little hatchet. Tawny has got to work!"

Owen looked cunningly at the child, who shook her head slowly.

"Owen, Owen," continued Nattie, hastily, "there is something attached to it! It is the trunk of a tree, but it bears a burden."

The youth sprang upon a rock and gazed earnestly out into the lake.

"It is a man!" he said. "My friend, the wind, is bringin' me another subject!"

"It may bring a body, but certainly no living creature," returned Nathalia. "The waves go over it every moment."

"I'll get my canoe, and go out. Tawny, help me drag it into the water. You must work, Tawny, if you live with me. I won't have no lazy folks on my island!"

"'Tis impossible, Owen! The little vessel will be swamped in an instant!" exclaimed Nathalia, alarmed at the boldness of this project. He drew the canoe from its covert without heeding her. Before a minute had passed, it was rocking in the water.

"Jump in, Tawny," cried Owen.

"No! no!" protested Nathalia. "Would you drown the poor child? Don't, I entreat of you!"

"Believe in Owen—Owen and his devil. Don't the whisperer know what to do? Didn't he tell me to take Tawny? If the king is drowned, hadn't she ought to be drowned with him?"

Tawny stepped into the canoe and seated herself with perfect composure. There was a proud smile on her lips.

Nathalia ran to take her out, but Owen pushed the canoe off with his paddle.

"Never you be afraid!" he said. "You shall see us dance a gay dance on the waves. Tawny is in the bow for my figure-head. Every vessel must have a figure-head, you know? Ha, ha! Isn't she a dark little creature?"

The waves run high, the rough winds blow,
No one can follow where we go!"

He fixed himself steadily in the stern, and with strong, bold strokes, sent the frail bark against the turbid waters, right in the face of the wind.

Nathalia clasped her hands in terror. The canoe, its bows slightly raised by the superior weight of Owen in the stern, glided over the opposing waves with wonderful lightness. The great billows rolled under it steadily. The bark was now poised on a foaming crest, now hidden from sight in the valley of water beyond. Nathalia knew that the slightest deviation from its course would prove fatal to the tiny shell. Several times she thought it had disappeared forever, but it as often appeared on the next swell, with Tawny sitting, like a stone figure, in the bow. A few fearful moments elapsed. She silently prayed for their preservation. Every time she caught a glimpse of the voyagers, Owen's paddle was falling with a firm and dexterous hand, and the canoe, quivering and trembling, flew like a frightened bird into the teeth of the wind.

Her anxiety increased as he neared the tree. How could he approach it in safety? A single blow from the unwieldy trunk, as it heaved to and fro, would dash his birchen vessel in pieces. She watched the brave youth breathlessly. He shot alongside the floating mass; he seized a projecting limb with his hand, and holding it firmly, steadied the canoe, and changed places

with Tawny. While he kept the vessel from a rude collision with the tree, Tawny made a rope fast to the shore end, then threw the coil to Owen, who caught it and pushed quickly from the dangerous object. The next moment, the canoe was flying toward the island, with the tree and its burden in tow.

To Nathalia, this seemed little less than a miracle. She was sure no one but Owen would have attempted such a feat, in such a shell, in such a turmoil of waters. She beheld him tossing to the shore, with no common emotions. Tawny, motionless and drenched to the skin, with her bronzed face turned to Owen, looked like a supernatural creature that had arisen from the damp caverns of the lake. Owen's long hair streamed back upon his shoulders, and his handsome face was calm and wildly earnest.

The canoe sprang like a sea-gull through the light breakers upon the sand, the daring voyagers leaped ashore, and the next instant the canoe was above the reach of the return waves.

"He's dead! he's dead!" exclaimed Nathalia, as she caught sight of the pale face of Bernard Ross.

"We'll bring him to life again," said Owen, wading into the water and freeing Bernard from the tree with his knife. He then drew him to a dry spot. Though terribly shocked at this spectacle, Nathalia hastened to aid him. She recognized those inanimate features; she remembered that she had seen him at Ralph's cabin on that eventful night.

"Don't tremble, pretty one," said Owen. "The whisperer and I know what to do. Give me your little knife from your little belt, Tawny. Look at me, and see what I'll do. He that runs by my side tells me."

Owen bared Bernard's arm, and plunged Tawny's knife into the white skin. Presently the blood began to flow; he had opened a vein. A surgeon could not have done it better.

"Do you notice that, Nattie?" he said, gleefully. "Never you say I don't know! We always know—this light, cunning fellow and I. If he was dead, the red wouldn't come. Dead folks don't bleed, Nattie. Hold the arm, Tawny. You must work if you live with me. Little Ingin girls don't care for blood."

Tawny supported the arm as she was bidden, with the greatest immobility of countenance. Her dark, solemn face might have been cut in stone, for all that it expressed. There was something strange in the companionship of these two.

The blood trickled slowly at first, more freely anon. A sigh from Bernard testified to the success of Owen's surgery. He opened his eyes and saw Nathalia; he closed them with a low moan, thinking that he was still dreaming on the seething waters of the lake.

"Give me your frock, Tawny, to tear up for bandages. Little Ingin girls don't need anything to wear," said Owen.

Without a word of complaint, Tawny was in the act of taking off her only article of clothing, when Nathalia interposed and supplied Owen's want with her handkerchief. Tawny re-adjusted her garment with the utmost sang froid.

Owen stopped the flow of blood and bandaged the arm. Nattie witnessed his manipulations with surprise.

"How did you learn to do all this?" she asked, softly.

"You ask questions! Queen of the island, you always ask questions! Don't you see him that runs beside me? Can't you see him flitin' and floatin' along? Owen is never put to it for thoughts. You think you are wise; everybody thinks they're wise, and I a fool. Did you ever hear them mutter and say: 'He's mad! he's mad!'? Ah, ha! it's best to be mad. You and Tawny would be better if you were mad. How your cheeks glow, Nattie! Rather want him to live, don't you? I saw him look at you. He was sorry when the lightnin' took away your wits. He took you up in his arms and carried you out, and let the rain rain on you. How the rain rained on you! If you'd been a baby, he couldn't been more careful. When the bad one knocked him down and carried you away, he run like he's distracted. I thought he's goin' to be mad, too. Ah, ha! He'd like you for his queen, I think. Now I'll roll him about; the whisperer says I must roll him about. Perhaps he's swallowed water."

"There's no need—no need!" said Bernard, faintly. "I wonder what has happened, and where I am? Have I had a horrible dream?"

"Never you be afraid," answered Owen.

"Who speaks?" said Bernard.

"One who will not harm you," replied Nathalia.

"Wh t voice is that?" asked Bernard, vaguely.

"It is Queen Nattie's."

Bernard looked at Owen dubiously; his consciousness vibrated between the light and darkness. If one moment brought him apprehensive powers, the next swept them away. He had an indefinite consciousness of the presence of Nathalia, but it was misty and dream-like. Owen, at length, got him upon his feet, and aided by Nathalia, succeeded in supporting him to the lodge. Then began the work of nursing and friendly ministrations. Bernard forgot his sufferings, and with the half-realized spell of Nattie upon him, sank into a grateful and refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

DISCONTENT.

To awake in the morning and find himself surrounded by Owen and his family, was a strange surprise to Bernard. Nathalia, however, drew more of his attention than any other object. It was a pleasure to see her sitting quietly in a rural chair, constructed by the ingenious hands of the self-constituted sovereign of the island; that seat was the throne of this sylvan queen. It was raised upon a platform some eighteen inches higher than the natural floor of the lodge, and accessible by two steps covered with deer-skin. Nattie's royal feet rested on a mat of otter fur. She was certainly, in the estimation of the young man, no contemptible power. Allegiance to her would be no hardship. He would gladly have prostrated himself before the simple majesty of her beauty. He believed her worthy to be the Queen of Hearts. He envied Tawny, who was gracefully crouching on the steps, and the squirrels that sometimes perched on her evergreen throne.

Owen was stretched on a panther skin at the other side of the lodge, contemplating his household with manifest satisfaction.

Bernard felt how great the change had been from death on the lake to this new life. He was fain to fancy that he had fallen upon real geni, whose enchantments had conjured into visibility this charming spectacle. He was afraid the magic wand would wave again, and the whole vanish.

Nathalia perceived that he was looking at her: she blushed and smiled joyfully. She hastened to inquire how he found himself; if his sleep had been refreshing; if he felt quite restored?

"I am better," answered Bernard, "than I ever expected to be. I can hardly believe that I am here and living. I cannot tell you what I have suffered."

"The wicked ones didn't kill you that time," said Owen.

"Some person or persons made a horrible attempt on your life, it would seem," observed Nathalia.

"Yes," answered Bernard, shuddering.

"We'll find all that out one of these days," added Owen. "You shall stay on my island till you are well; and the killers will tremble when you see them."

Nattie was by this time very pale. A suspicion of the perpetrators of this outrage was doubtless in her mind. She did not care to have her thoughts confirmed. The subject was sickening and distasteful. She desired that the past might be obliterated. If the names of Ralph Quimby and his associates were never mentioned in her presence, she should be glad.

Bernard perceived her emotion, and was disposed to dwell no longer on the subject.

"Owen and his devil have talked about the killers," said the mad boy. "We've made up our minds about them; we know, but we won't tell. They are lookin' high and low for Nattie. Well, let them peep and peer, and spy about, and trail through the woods. But never you fear!"

"This is a very strange youth!" remarked Bernard.

"Do you think so?" interposed Owen. "It's because I've lost my wits. You'll never know anything till you've lost your wits. Tawny, don't you see he's goin' to get up? Bring him some water to wash his face, and cook him something to eat."

Bernard's recovery was rapid. In two days he was able to walk about the island. During that time Owen made several visits to the shore in his canoe. The young man wandered with Nathalia through the green bowers of this water-girt retreat. There was deep pleasure in this. He desired nothing better. He was satisfied to dwell there forever with Nattie. It was just the spot for love. With her, his desires would nev-

er wander outside the limits of the island. He thought all this, but had not yet uttered it. He would declare himself some time, when he had learned more of her inclinations and feelings; but there was no need to hurry the matter. To be premature, was to risk all.

Nathalia, thus thrown alone upon his society and protection, was often timid and reserved. This circumstance did not surprise him much, for it seemed natural to the peculiar position in which she was placed.

He explored with her nearly every part of the island, which was about two miles across at its widest point, and in a circular form, rising out of the water like a beautiful green hillock. Tawny always followed them, at a distance of half-a-dozen yards, with her hands crossed behind her, her eyes fixed straight before her; never turning to the right or left with the ordinary curiosity of children. Bernard often looked back, wonderingly at the grave, undemonstrative little creature, who was ever in sight, but never came too near, or talked, or obtruded, or meddled in any manner. Although thus haunted, neither were disturbed or annoyed. And so the bare head and shoulders and feet followed them wherever they went.

One day Bernard walked alone. He liked a solitary ramble, because he could think of Nathalia without interruption. On this particular occasion he wandered nearly around the island. The air was pleasant and balmy; it was a luxury to be in the sunshine and shade. Wearied with exercise, he turned his face in the direction of Owen's palace. He had gone but a short distance when he beheld a sight that made him pause. Through a vista in the trees, he saw Nathalia and Whitelaw. Far enough from them to form a somewhat lengthy triangle, he described, also, the inevitable Tawny. This tableau Bernard had not expected: it took him by surprise. Nothing could have disturbed him so much. They were simply looking at each other, at first; now they began to talk. He could not hear them; but he knew they were conversing, by their gestures. Gone was Bernard's contentment. A dark cloud of doubt hung over him; jealousy cruelly beset him. The only man that he feared as a rival, had appeared on his happy island through the influence of some malignant star. His former impressions were prophetic.

Nathalia's manner was no longer reserved, he thought. There was a certain confidence between the two that troubled him.

Whitelaw began to look like his enemy. Jealousy promised, soon, to develop hatred and resentment. He stood silent and miserable in his covert till they parted, then followed her slowly to the lodge. He did not tell her what he had seen; he waited to see if she would allude to it. Another person on the island was certainly an event worth speaking of. If she concealed the fact, would it not shew that he came there as a lover? It was easy to interpret her taciturnity into maiden reserve: thus he construed it, for she said nothing of having seen Whitelaw. A doubt is bad in all cases: Bernard had a doubt, and it poisoned his enjoyment. The beautiful island lost a part of its charm.

A change came over him. He grew moody and absent. The thought that Whitelaw was on the island, was sufficient to annoy and fret him. He resolved to find him and bring the matter to a crisis at once. He searched the island, he walked its length, and breadth, and circumference. He addressed himself to the pursuit with morbid intensity. Nothing came of all this labor, at first; but at length success seemed to crown his endeavors; he discovered Whitelaw, one day, near the shore; but he mysteriously disappeared, nor could he find him again at that time. Mystery, as well as love, had visited Owen's kingdom.

"Owen," said Bernard, on his return, "does any one besides ourselves live on this island?"

"Yes," answered the youth. "A great many birds, and deer, and squirrels."

"I don't mean animals, but persons?"

Bernard kept his eyes upon Owen.

"Never you fear!" said the youth, with significant motions of the head and hands. "Nobody will hurt you. Queen Nattie has a smile and a blush for you. Ah, ha! that is a great deal. If the killers come, we'll send them away. We will get the best of the wicked ones, yet. A cunning fellow who runs beside me, says that. He knows; there's nothing but he has a hand in. Don't be cast down, Prince Bernard. You may kiss the hand of the Queen, some time. Ah, ha!"

CHAPTER XVII.

KID KERLY AND NEIL TRAVIS.

We left Kid Kerly doing his best to discover some sign to guide him to Mary Danton, in whose fate he took a lively interest. He brought into use all that skill that life in the mountains had taught him; but the heavy rain had effectually washed away the trail of the abductors. Most faithfully he adhered to his purpose, expecting momentarily to be joined by Bernard. The day gradually declined, and the young man's non-appearance began to give him uneasiness.

"I'm sure he wouldn't desert me," he muttered to himself, rising from the bent and painful position necessary to the close examination he had been making. "Some'at has happened to him, sure as shootin'! He isn't no coward; didn't 'pear to be, leastwise. I'll trail him. Wah!"

The mountaineer was not long in discovering the fresh trail of Bernard; to him it was as plain as a post-road.

"What a good thing a little larnin' is!" said Kid, with a quiet chuckle. "If the lubbers down in the settlements wanted to find a missin' person, they'd go runnin' this way, an' that, hurry-skurry, hollerin' like mad. They don't understan' the quiet, business-like matter of takin' a trail and stickin' to it. Lord! they don't know a sign from a rabbit-track. Here it runs along like a thread. I allow he's struck a rifle-ball line to the lake, and he went at an unequal gait, too; for sometimes his steps are long and hurried, and then ag'in short and draggin'. The youngster was thinkin' perdigious! If he was not, I don't know hind-sights from fore-sights."

Thus drawing inferences and communing with himself, Kid Kerly tracked Bernard Ross to the shore of the lake. He stood on the margin of that great inland sea. The sun was still high enough to gleam brightly along the waters and fall pleasantly on the form of the mountaineer, who gazed out upon the glassy expanse with emotions of pleasure. He turned from this contemplation, anon, to the immediate object of his search.

"Straight to the water," he mused. "Hasn't gone into Lake Superior to bathe, has he? A confounded long swim acrost it, maybe. But what you talkin' about, old hoss?" he added, addressing himself. "Tend to your business, won't ye? Hillo! more tracks."

Kerly made a careful inspection of the shore.

"Them copper-diggin' critters, true's I live! I smell mischief, I do! Here's a stout stick, and here's a drop of blood on a stone, and here's where they rolled a log into the water. I see it all as plain as if I'd been hid up there in the bushes while 'twas goin' on. There's been a murder, that's sartin! Poor Bernard! They tied his body to the trunk of a tree. The wind's been blowin' like great guns all day, nearly, and he's a good ways off by this time. Traps and trapsacks! I should like to shoot them white niggurs plum' centre! To think the lad was with me, live and well, no longer ago nor this mornin'! Now, where is he? Rapped on the head onawares, and sent out to sea on a log. We're short-lived critters, we be. We don't stan' it long, nowadays. Some'at happens to us. But this isn't the proper fashion o' goin'. If a chap must go under, let him be rubbed out 'cordin' to the course o' natur' by an Injun tomahawk or gun, and have his ha'r lifted like a decent human. Ay, that's the style, and I expect to go so. They'll find old Kid Kerly, one o' these days, bleachin' at the foot of a mountain, or whitenin' peacefully by the bank of a stream. I want the suns of the great Nor'-west to shine on me, even arter I'm dead, till every ounce of me crumbles to the sile, and the perarie grass springs dark from my ashes."

Kid Kerly removed his cap, and pushed his long hair behind his ears.

"Don't go to knockin' me on the head!" he went on, with increasing earnestness. "Don't go to launchin' me into old Superior! That won't do for an old trapper, you know? If ye should try that on to this hoss, I'd git right up and walk my bones straight to the mountains, where I've hunted, and trapped, and played hide-and-seek with danger, and enjoyed myself doin' it. Kid Kerly owes his skulp to the red Injuns, and he a'n't agoin' to cheat 'em out on't!"

He wiped his tawny forehead with his sleeve, then glanced indignantly at the steps in the sand.

"You treacherous dogs!" he resumed, shaking his rifle threateningly. "You've got an old panther arter you, that'll be likely to nip

your heels, sooner or later. You'd better have a dozen bloodhounds at your back, than one Kid Kerly. I'll revenge him! I swear it, by this air, and sky, and water!"

Having made this vow, Kid's mind seemed easier. He had now a trail to guide him, and the miners would have had just reason to fear, had they seen him patiently following their tracks.

In a thick cluster of bushes not far from the shore, he found Bernard's rifle and ammunition. He slung the rifle upon his back, together with the shot-pouch and powder-flask, and continued his way. The trail trended off to the south, in the direction of Ralph Quimby's cabin, of which he, in due time, came in sight. Kerly entered it with misgivings. He found Neil Travis exhausted upon the bed. There were fresh spots of blood upon the floor.

"Have they been here?" inquired the mountaineer.

"Yes, they have been here," answered Travis, rising. "And they've gone, too."

"And you're alone with 'em?"

"Quite alone with them."

There was something fierce and stern in the young man's voice.

"Well?" said Kerly, inquisitively.

"Ralph Quimby wished to throttle me; he tried it. But Nat Stratton stood trembling, like a man with delirium tremens. If they had both set upon me at once! These arms of mine are not overgrown, but there's a deal of energy in 'em. I threw him off in a moment; he fell heavily; his head struck on the stone hearth. He didn't expect that; he thought my wounds had made me helpless. But I believe they made me more dangerous. When Ralph arose, I noticed that he was giddy, and there was a crimson ooze from his mouth. Would you have looked for such an ending as this?"

The mountaineer sat down on a block and studied the features of Travis, somewhat, before answering.

"Sartin not! You're a game chicken; ought to be in the mountains. But this hoss can't stop to talk; there's business afore him. The gal's got to be found, and Bernard's death avenged."

"Bernard? Dead?" exclaimed Neil.

"Ay, rubbed out and sent adrift; and the copper-diggin' critters are at the bottom on't!"

"And Nathalia?"

"I wasn't speakin' o' her in partic'lar, though I heerd she's missin'. That solemn critter, Whitelaw, told us on't. 'Twas another feminine that we found starvin', that I had in my mind. We took care on her—Bernard and I—and nussed her up as if we was her brothers. But she was stole from us, was Mary Danton."

"What!" cried Travis, wildly.

"Come, now, none o' that! You look as if you's goin' to run mad and bite me. What's Mary Danton to you?"

"Mary Danton!" repeated Neil Travis, springing to his feet and staggering toward Kid Kerly. "What's Mary Danton to me?" he vociferated. "What is she to me but Mary Danton, and being that, she is *all*—everything! Don't trifle with me, mountaineer. If you have accidentally heard that name, don't come here to play upon me with it."

"Peace, boy—peace!" answered Kerly, soothingly, whose perceptions were quick. "I'm not the man to harm your Mary Danton—if she is yours. Bernard Ross and I snatched her from starvation."

"But my Mary Danton was not this one!" shouted Travis, like one distracted. "She was delicate as a lily, fair as the morning, sweet as the honey-dew! Don't come here to torture me, trapper."

"Softly, sonny—softly!" answered Kid, with wonderful forbearance. "There's no need to work ourselves into a fever; we might as well act like reasonable critters. I never trapped a beaver nor an otter so smooth and poety to look at as this same Mary Danton. As for fairness, a cloudless day isn't so fair; and as for sweetness, I should judge she might be sweet. She was lost, any way, and we found her and took care of her. One of us kept near her all the time till last night, when Bernard, hearin' me fire, come out to see what I'd got. 'Twas a deer I'd been lucky enough to save, and we cut it up and lugged it in, thinkin' that we'd cook the nicest pieces for her. The upshot on't was, that she couldn't be found when we returned. We diskivered tracks in the little camp, and some signs of a struggle; when we knowed she was carried off."

"What you are telling me sounds like a dream," said Travis.

"Wish 'twas, and nothin' more; but you see you can't make a dream of a reality."

"And you haven't found her? You don't know where she is? You can't tell what has happened to her?" Travis clasped his hands, and looked at the trapper imploringly.

"True, every word on't! You've said jest what I don't know."

"Be quiet a moment," answered Neil Travis, sitting down upon the bed. "This intelligence has nearly overpowered me. Don't speak till I am calm."

Travis trembled violently, at first, but presently his nerves grew steadier. "There!" he said. "I am more manly. You gave me a bewildering shock. I will be frank with you, mountaineer. Mary Danton is my sweetheart."

"Diskivered that myself!" replied Kerly, dryly.

"I would have married her, but they would not let me. They said she was too young, and that I was not the man to make her happy. Her father and brother were hard with me. I was angry and miserable, and went away. But I was going back to her; I could not live without her. That's the way the matter stands with Mary Danton and Neil Travis."

"Wah!"

"Tell me again about finding her. I want to know just how it happened." Kerly related the manner in which he and Bernard had found the young woman, and the details respecting her disappearance, together with his more recent discoveries on the lake shore. Travis listened to him attentively. When he had finished, Travis said:

"Throw me my hunting-shirt, comrade; it hangs on that peg yonder."

"What you goin' to do?" Kid inquired.

"Put it on, of course!" replied Neil.

"Well, after you put it on, what you goin' to do?" queried Kerly.

"Find Mary Danton!" answered Travis, with low voice, and compressed lips.

"You look like it!" said Kerly, with a good-humored grunt. "Why, you're so weak, you couldn't foller yourself to your own grave, if you's dead this minute!"

"I am strong, now; you have cured me. You shall see what a resolute will can do. It would be my duty to hunt for her, if I had to crawl on my hands and knees. Do you think I could lie here on this bed, and she in the hands of villains? No, no! it would be a bed of thorns—a couch of fire!"

Neil Travis took a turn across the room.

"Look at me! Is not my step steady?"

"It 'pears so, now; but you'll give out on the first mile."

"We won't dispute about that," said Neil, determinedly. "What are these wounds? Nothing; mere scratches! The sight of Mary—if I find her safe—will heal them."

"But if you shouldn't? If anything has happened to her?"

The perspiration started suddenly from Neil's face.

"In that case," he answered, in a hollow voice, "I shall know what to do."

"Good! I can read the language of your eyes; there's a heap of wicked talk in 'em jest now."

Travis put on his hunting-shirt, and made hasty preparations to go with the mountaineer.

"Here's Bernard's gun and ammunition, if you must," said the latter. "The poor lad'll never use it again. He little thought, when we left me, that we should never meet in this lower world any more."

"It shall avenge his death!" muttered Neil, hoarsely. "I'm ready."

"Be patient—be patient! Let's start right. If there's anything to eat hereabouts, let's eat it."

"Cut and help yourself," answered Neil, pointing to a haunch of venison. "You need it, I dare say; but my appetite is gone."

Kerly cut off some slices of the meat, and put them into the wallet that he carried under his arm, then hesitatingly left the cabin with the young man, whose strength he greatly distrusted. He had much rather have undertaken the enterprise alone, little doubting but Travis would prove an encumbrance rather than a help.

"I intend," said the mountain-man, "to pass the night in the neighborhood of some old copper-mines. The sun is settin', you see, and it's too late to foller a trail."

"As you will," answered Travis. "I trust to your sagacity."

Kid Kerly took the lead, and Neil followed him without any signs of faltering. After a walk

of an hour, Kerly halted in a thick growth of young pines. Cutting some boughs and spreading his blanket on them for Travis to rest on, he produced his pipe, filled, lighted it, and casting himself quietly upon the mossy earth, smoked composedly, and watched the dark wreaths curling up through the branches.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SHIBBOLETH.

Mary Danton was glad to sit upon the soft seat offered by Ralph. Her strength was exhausted, and her mind depressed by harrowing fears. The dampness of the walls, the grim arches above her, the dimness that pervaded the passages, the moody faces of the men, the sepulchral stillness, all conspired to fill her with dread and doubt. How could she for a moment feel safe? How could she close her eyes to tranquil sleep, and awake refreshed and hopeful? She sat a long time and watched the miners. They kindled a fire; they brought food from another part of the mine, and cooked it. They invited her to join their repast, but she shook her head despairingly.

"You shan't be hurt," said Ralph. "Take courage."

"This place is so horrible!" she murmured. "It is so dreadful to be here."

"Go to sleep!" answered Ralph. "You shall rest in safety. You could be in a worse place. I have passed many nights here in comfort. We have both fuel and food; you need neither be cold nor hungry."

Mary shivered.

"Young woman," added Ralph, "you are distressing yourself with unnecessary terrors. It is true we brought you here by mistake. When we seized you in the darkness, we thought it was another. Now you are with us, you must make the best of it. Wrap yourself in those blankets and forget your troubles. He who disturbs you—he glanced at Stratton—"will have to disturb me first. I'll heap the fagots so high that the blaze shall make you warm, and keep this dark place cheerful while you sleep."

There was a certain rough earnestness in Ralph's voice that induced Mary Danton to place some confidence in what he said. No one needed rest more than she. After keeping wakeful what appeared to her a long time, her head gradually sank on the blankets, and she lost consciousness in sleep. But she often started in alarm, from horrible dreams and the darkest fancies of slumber. Whenever her eyes unclosed, she saw Ralph sitting with his back against a pile of fagots, motionless as the dim wall behind him; while Stratton, stretched upon the earth, turned restlessly, muttering and moaning. She finally forgot their presence, and slept the profound sleep of innocence.

When she awoke again, the fire was still blazing, but the men had disappeared. It was a comfort to be alone; she could breathe better for their absence. She left her couch, warmed herself by the crackling flame, then commenced to explore the place of her imprisonment, by the aid of a miner's lamp. The mine was evidently an old one that had been worked years before, and abandoned. She approached the shaft which she had so perilously descended. She could see the sunlight above. She looked for the ladder, but it had been withdrawn. She had entertained a hope that she should find some way of escape; thus far, she could see none. She went cautiously in various directions, but every hole, and corner, and cranny was black and repellent. There was mould on the arched roof and dreary walls. She came, at length, to where the earth had been recently moved, and there were fresh marks of man's labor. It was some solace to know that human creatures had been there.

She continued to advance. The passage grew very narrow. She saw tubs, pans, picks, shovels, and various mining implements. A little stream came trickling down from above. Mary Danton held up her lamp, and perceived bright-yellow particles shining in the earth. Impelled by curiosity, she grasped a handful of the glistening soil. The full glare of the light fell on it; it was freighted with gold!

She knew that gold was the mad, prevailing passion of man; absorbed in the pursuit of it, he forgot all else. For this ore he bartered honor, conscience, truth, and sometimes life. She realized the importance of this discovery, but it did not elate her. She had more at hazard than treasures of this kind. She would have exchanged mountains of it for freedom. She remained some minutes gazing at the glittering grains.

She heard a suppressed exclamation, and turning, beheld Ralph Quimby. There was fear and dismay in his expression.

"You have unlocked the fatal door!" he said, excitedly. "You have obtained a secret that will do you no good."

"And which I value not!" she answered. "What is this dust to me? I have but one ambition, and that is to be restored to my friends."

"You have identified yourself with us," replied Quimby. "You have become a part of our family. You have stepped within the charmed circle of our lives, and cannot recede."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Danton, filled with sudden apprehension at Ralph's singular language and manner.

"That you hold a Shibboleth that links you to me forever! You can never leave this mine!"

Ralph folded his arms, and looked steadily at the terror-stricken girl.

"Never leave this mine!" she repeated, mechanically.

"I have said it!" answered Ralph, with firmness.

"But you will unsay it!" cried Miss Danton. "It is impossible that you can form such a terrible purpose. It surpasses the cruelty of human nature. Can this wretched dross pay you for such a crime?"

"Dross!" exclaimed Ralph. "Don't it purchase everything? Does it not rule the world? Is it not life and death? Is it not fame, and ease, and honor? Girl, you know not its power!"

"With bad men, it is an evil power; but with the good, it is beneficent. Think what it is to be shut out from the air and the sunlight, and the flowers and the trees, and the songs of birds? It is dreadful! It would be a mercy to kill me at once. This is a tomb, not a place of human habitation."

Mary Danton advanced a step, and stood in a beseeching attitude before the miner. The latter contemplated her in silence. That something which had sprung into existence within him on the previous night, grew more defined. Her figure and face were more pleasing to his sight.

"You can go out of this mine," he said, presently.

"I can go out! You but jested with me! It was unkind to play with my fears."

"You can go out!"—he paused, and looked at her inquisitively.

"I can go out?" repeated Mary, interrogatively, startled by something in his expression.

"You can go out, as my wife!"

Ralph bent forward to see how this announcement would affect her. A chill went over her, which did not come from the dampness of the mine.

"I am afraid," answered Mary Danton, with a ghastly smile, "that I shall never go out!"

If she had shrieked and made noisy demonstrations of repugnance, Ralph would have liked it better than her pallid, passive calmness.

"I will not tell you that I love you," he resumed, "because the tale would fall on scornful ears. I will make no promises of being your willing slave, and gratifying every wish that gold can supply. I will not speak of travel in foreign countries, and the splendors of wealth. I will spare you all that. You will choose between light and darkness—the dull monotony of this tomb, and the charm and novelty of all the world."

"This mine," said Mary Danton, "begins to look like a palace. These walls are quite cheerful, and the arched roof, methinks, is hung with diamonds!"

She looked mockingly at Ralph, who was less calm.

"I'll not hear your decision to-day," he said, with an impatient gesture. "Your mind is too much burdened with these revelations. You will reflect a few days. You will realize what a terrible thing it is to share our secret."

"Let us go out of this dampness; it must be warmer where the fire burns," said Mary, shivering.

Ralph stood in the narrow passage; she brushed by him, and he followed her to the fire.

"I'm sure this is quite comfortable," she added, holding her white hands to the blaze. "If you give me food and fire, and never show me your face, existence may be endured, even here. But the sight of you and your friend would soon kill me."

"It's a woman's privilege to have her say," muttered Quimby. "It is the misfortune of our sex that we cannot prevent yours from talking. But I will make due allowance for the ex-

citement of your mind. You shall have, to-day, that solitude which you ask."

He advanced to a niche, in which were placed some rude shelves.

"Here you will find our larder, which I have taken some pains to replenish this morning. Don't starve yourself, my fair friend! Here is a pail, and yonder you will find a little stream of clear, cold water oozing from the ground. Remember that you are not so miserable as you might be. You are as much in my power as the poor fly is, in the spider's web. Look at me, and see how strong I am."

He held up his arms, and the swelling muscles proved that his boast was not in vain.

"There's an arm that is stronger!" she said, with an instinctive shrinking from the man.

"Ah! now I touch your fears. You are gasping with terror. Be assured of present safety. I leave you, trusting that reflection will make you wiser."

"Stay!" cried Mary. "I will bind myself by a solemn obligation never to reveal your secret."

"The thought is natural, but foolish. Think no more of it. You cannot break from the circle. You belong to those who hold the mighty Shibboleth of gold."

Mary Danton heard the ladder adjusted from above, and Ralph ascend, when it was again drawn up.

She was alone once more, and could think without interruption of what she had heard.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GOLD-DIGGER'S GRAVE.

Mary Danton resolved not to yield tamely to despair, but to make an effort for freedom. To sit and bewail her misfortunes, was certainly of no use. She endeavored to take a philosophical view of her situation, and act like a creature endowed with reason. The very thought of attempting to baffle the miner, gave her strength. Having determined to bear up instead of yielding supinely to circumstances, she looked over Ralph's larder, and made a tolerable meal. She then replenished one of the miner's lamps with oil, and set out with fresh courage to examine her subterranean prison. She soon satisfied herself that the mine had not been worked for many years, save in the spot where she had discovered gold. This fact led her to hope that she might possibly find a passage somewhere—crooked, narrow, and difficult of ascent, perchance, leading to the surface. She knew that ores were found in veins, running in various directions, which were followed by those seeking precious metals. On this slight basis she continued her search.

She found various excavations, more or less extended, some shallow, some deep. She entered, finally, a narrow tunnel, a portion of which was cut through solid rock, and which was longer than any she had found. She followed it a considerable distance. To her disappointment, it ended abruptly. It had been long since the miners' tools had resounded there. The sides of the pit were covered with green mould and moss. Mary placed her lamp on the ground and sat down to rest, with her back against the end of the passage, cushioned upon the soft and yielding lichens. She noticed, as she threw her light weight upon the flinty wall, that a portion of it seemed to vibrate and move a little. She tried the experiment several times, with the same result. This led her to push upon one side with her hands; it yielded, and by exerting all her power, a stone door swung slowly open. The stone was about three feet square, and hung by the centre on copper or iron bolts; so that when it was open, it was poised in the middle of the passage. To convince herself there was no mistake, she closed and pushed it open repeatedly.

A thick, suffocating air came out, nearly extinguishing the lamp. She waited till it burned up brightly; then, stooping, entered with some hesitation this hidden chamber. Having passed the portal, the passage widened and grew more lofty; she was soon able to stand erect. She advanced a few yards slowly, examining the vault with searching curiosity. She saw, scattered here and there, various implements of mining; but they were covered with rust. The wooden handles of the picks and spades were crumbling with age. Years had elapsed, manifestly, since human hands had wielded them.

She proceeded a few steps further, and perceived something white upon the earth. She approached it with secret awe; tremblingly thrust forward her lamp; its rays fell upon a skeleton!

Mary Danton neither shrieked nor dropped her lamp, but she did recoil with terror and yield for a moment to a natural weakness that was quite pardonable. A set of bones, without their dress of flesh, is never an agreeable object, and there are circumstances under which a skeleton becomes positively frightful; and if this was not one of them, the approximation was certainly very close.

It was some time before Mary could summon fortitude to take a nearer survey of this mournful memento of what was once a sentient being. She conquered, as much as possible, her superstitious fears; she stood beside the skeleton. She held the lamp over it; it lay on the blackened and decayed remains of a blanket. On each side, beneath the bony fingers, were two discolored canvas bags, which fell in pieces when she touched them with her foot, leaving heaps of yellow ore!

The conviction flashed upon Mary Danton, that Ralph Quimby and his associates were not the first that had held the gold-secret. Here was the wreck of one who had evidently made that important discovery, and worked the vein that contained the precious dust. He had died with his treasure, in silence and darkness. On a stone near him was a rusty lamp, without oil, and a copper vessel, from which he had doubtless often drank.

She continued her explorations. A little further on she found where a fire had been built; the ashes and charred brands remained as on the day when it burned out. Perhaps the vital spark of the gold-seeker went out with it. He had, clearly, taken up his residence there, and had, perhaps, spent years in accumulating treasure that was never to benefit him.

The spot was quite dry and habitable, compared with other parts of the mine. Miss Danton resolved to turn this discovery to some use; it would do for a hiding-place. She laid her plans immediately. Her first care was to dispose of the skeleton, which was no agreeable task. Following the passage still farther, she found a wide seam in the vein-stone; into this, overcoming her shivering repugnance, she drew hither the remains of the gold-digger, which went rattling down out of sight. She turned away, astonished at her own resolution.

The gold which the canvas bags had contained, she scraped up into the copper vessel. There were several pounds of it, but for her it possessed little value. In a short time she had removed every vestige of the unsightly object she had found there. This nerve-trying ordeal passed, she returned to the place where she had passed the night. She took away, in the first place, all the miners' lamps and oil; next, the blankets, then the provisions; and continued her journeys to and fro so industriously, that in a couple of hours she had conveyed everything of possible utility to the secret vault. She did not forget to carry to her hiding-place the pail that Ralph had mentioned, full of water from the rivulet.

The excitement of these proceedings raised her spirits wonderfully, and she was far more hopeful when all this was done. Before entering finally this invisible chamber, she closed the stone door carefully, to see if it went firmly to its place, leaving no sign of its uses. It shut closely upon the moss, bidding defiance to the most inquisitive eye. Nothing but actual manipulation could discover the secret of the swinging stone. Satisfied on this point, Mary Danton entered the gold-digger's chamber, and shut herself in. True, it was an isolated and silent spot, rendered gloomier by the fate of its former occupant. To make the door unyielding, in case the miners should accidentally push against it, in searching for her, she braced an iron bar against it, after which she spent some time in trying to give an air of comfort to her retreat. She spread blankets upon the stony floor, and hung others across the passage, to shut out the spot where the miner had died. She kept but one lamp lighted, not knowing how long she might be obliged to remain there, and feeling how dreadful darkness would be in such a place. Her work done, with nothing more to busy her mind, time began to weigh heavily upon her. The hours were painfully irksome, the dull monotony being worse than the severest labor. From sheer idleness, she examined every inch of the vault. While thus employed, she made another discovery: she found a little wooden door in the wall, which she opened without difficulty. It was the place where the gold-digger had hoarded his riches! The space contained a number of copper boxes, which she knew, by their weight, were full of gold. But these were

worthless, compared with some old volumes that were mouldering on a shelf. Beside these, were fire-arms of various kinds. She turned over the title-pages of the books with avidity. She rejoiced in the happy impulse that had led to this good fortune.

She had now something with which to occupy her thoughts, or at least to beguile them of a portion of their heaviness. Anything was better than absolute apathy. Having prayed to God for aid and support, she became more tranquil, and seated by the friendly lamp, read herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XX.

OWEN DRAWS THE LINE.

"We must make Tawny some moccasins," said Nathalia, to Owen.

It was on the same day that Bernard had seen Whitelaw for a moment; he was still absent, seeking him.

"She don't need them," replied Owen. "Her feet are growing harder every day. Little Indian girls 'll do very well without shoes."

"It seems cruel to see her walking through the bushes with naked feet," added Nathalia.

"She don't mind it. If she had a dozen pairs of moccasins, she'd soon outgrow 'em."

"I do not think she is all Indian. There appears to me to be white blood in her veins. I believe she is a half-breed, Owen. She don't turn her feet inward when she walks, as Indians do."

"I told her not to. Said I to Tawny: 'Turn your toes out, or I'll cut 'em off.' She winked and blinked at me very solemn, and she's twisted her ankles like little saplin's twisted by the wind, ever since. It was hard for her, but she never complained. We can't have no savage ways in our kingdom, you know, Queen Nattie. Everybody must walk straight here. She must make her hair curl, by-and-by, like yours."

"That is impossible, Owen! She can't curl her hair; Nature has made it straight."

"Ah, ha! that's where Nature made a mistake; she should have made her feet straight and her hair crooked. Owen can see these things; he knows what's right and what's wrong."

"Where's Bernard?"

Owen looked earnestly at the girl.

"He's out, wanderin' this way and that. There's something the matter with his brain. I think Bernard is underwitted."

"Underwitted?" repeated Nathalia, coloring.

"Yes—that's it! He's goin' to be a fool; but he'll never be so smart and knowin' as this wild boy, if he's never so big a fool."

There was a cunning, satisfied smile on the lad's lips.

"What makes you think that he is losing his wits?" Nathalia asked, suppressing a smile.

"Because he sighs and mutters, now walks fast and now walks slow. He wasn't so when he first came to the island. He was happy when near the queen. Ah, ha! he had eyes for the queen. He never looked at Owen as he did at her. What have you done? Have you been cross to him?"

"I've done nothing," replied Nathalia, blushing.

"Never you tell lies, Queen Nattie! He that runs beside me will whisper if you tell lies."

Nathalia was considerably confused, but laughed at the naïveté of Owen.

"But come, Nattie—come! The melancholy one wants to see you. What makes him come here—the man that's hidin' on the island? Is it because he likes you, and you like him?"

"Did he send you?" asked Nathalia, quickly.

"Ay; he told me last night where to find him, and that I was to ask you to come."

"He is very friendly, Owen. Ought I to see him?"

Nathalia's manner was troubled.

"I don't know—I don't know!" replied Owen, shaking his head. "Owen's devil is dumb just now. Let me see if I can see him."

The youth took the fragment of a mirror from his pocket, which Nathalia had seen him have before, and looked at it.

"Yes, he's here—he's always here—but he moves his head from side to side, something like I do. The whisperer is full of mystery. But I'll have it out of him; I won't let him keep things back. He shan't run beside me, if he gets sullen and silent."

"I am very much perplexed, Owen," said Nattie, slowly following the youth. "This man called Whitelaw, seems good and true. Something draws me irresistibly toward him."

"But how is it with Bernard?" asked Owen, looking back over his shoulder. "Are you drawn to him, too?"

"You ask singular questions!" said Nattie, sighing.

"Who was that for? What did you sigh for, Queen Nattie? Was it for anything on the island? Was it for the sun, or the moon, or the sea, or the sky, or for the fish below, or the birds above?"

"I don't know, Owen. I am not happy; I am lonely, disturbed, and miserable! I wish there was some one to advise me."

Her voice was low and sad.

"Never you care for that! Owen has got the brain to advise you. Don't you be troubled about what's best. When things are goin' wrong, I'll let you know. But I must whisper with the whisperer before I talk of that! Tawny, don't drag your feet so! We are near the place now. You'll soon see him. But you'd better keep close. Bernard wouldn't like to find you talkin' with the melancholy one. I shouldn't wonder if Bernard had a whisperer, who has told him that Whitelaw is on the island."

"Do you think he knows it?" Nathalia asked, hurriedly.

"Owen's devil says 'Yes.' Ah, ha! that's what he walks so much for! Now I understand. He'll be angry, by-and-by. He's afraid—he's afraid." Owen dropped his voice. "He wants Queen Nattie all to himself. I wonder if there'll be a quarrel?"

"Quarrel?" repeated Nathalia, in a startled tone.

"Ay, a quarrel! Men often quarrel about pretty ones, and sometimes kill each other. That's because they're fools—isn't it?"

The words of Owen made a deep impression on the young girl. They showed her a danger that she had scarcely thought of. She knew not what to do. She was inclined to turn back and not see Whitelaw; but he had already observed her approach, and was advancing to meet her.

"I thank you, my child," he said, with a paternal air that quite assured her. "The sight of you makes me happier. You brought all this balm and sunshine—did you not? I did not notice either till you came."

"That's the way to talk to 'em," said Owen. "But you know, well enough, that Nattie did not bring the sunshine. There was sunshine on the island before she came," interposed Owen.

"True, lad; but the morning is brighter for her presence."

"Say what you've got to say," said Owen, "so I can take her back to the palace. Be careful that you don't please her too much, for nobody shall take her from the island. She ran away with me, and to me she belongs. Ah, ha! the whisperer has whispered! He says you're thinkin' of something that can't be. I must keep between you two."

Nathalia stepped back in alarm; a warning voice was in her ears.

Whitelaw himself was startled. He tried to shake off the feeling.

"I would not harm her, silly boy," he said.

"You'll drag her down, down, down!"

The youth's eyes were fixed vacantly upon Nathalia. His handsome face seemed illuminated with the spirit of second-sight.

"He is indeed mad!" murmured Whitelaw.

"But he is wise," added Nathalia. "His wisdom sometimes seems not of earth. Is he not beautiful in his innocence and truth? Let us shun each other! Let us never meet again! I feel in my soul that we are in danger of something, I know not what."

"'Tis a childish, groundless fear!" answered Whitelaw, in those thoughtful, earnest tones which were natural to him, and which signified to the honesty of his purpose. "Nathalia, I am wonderfully attracted to your side. You won me to yourself the first moment I beheld you. I cannot analyze the feeling. I should be content, I think, to have you always near me, to protect and take care of you, in a paternal way. Do you believe in me, child?"

Nathalia gazed into those pensive and earnest eyes, and replied, frankly:

"I do; I cannot help it!"

"What is it?—what is it?" moaned Owen, moving about uneasily. "He cannot make me understand him."

"Who cannot?" asked Nathalia.

"The whisperer!" sighed Owen. "But go apart, I tell you!"

"Am I evil?" asked Whitelaw, impressively.

"Not wicked—not wicked; but you are draggin' her down, down! Come away, Nattie! come away, sweet Nattie! Owen will save you."

The mad boy threw up his hands, and waved Nathalia and Whitelaw asunder.

"What does it mean?" cried Nathalia.

Owen drew a line with his finger on the ground between them.

"There! there! don't pass it—don't pass it, and you'll do well enough. Owen's devil says so. Tawny! Tawny! come here."

Tawny was standing like a statue, with her hands behind her, as usual, a few yards distant. She approached quickly at Owen's bidding.

"Stand between them!" said Owen. "Always stand between them. If you don't, I'll hate you! When she goes out, go with her. No matter if they beat and kill you; always stand between them!"

Tawny placed her little bare feet on the line Owen had drawn, with her back to Nathalia, and her face to Whitelaw.

"Ah, ha!" cried Owen rubbing his hands. "That will do it! Now you two are haunted—haunted as Owen is! You'll have to kill her to get rid of her. Let 'em cut you into inch pieces, Tawny, but don't you move. Ha, ha! ha, ha! what a whisperer! How much he knows! Now I can go."

With these words, rapidly spoken, Owen ran away and left them, muttering: "Ah, ha! ah, ha!"

Nathalia and Whitelaw looked at each other in a sort of terror. Both were troubled. Casting their eyes downward, they saw the little bronze figure between them, motionless and grave.

"I came," said Whitelaw, in a tremulous voice, "to say something; but I cannot say it."

"Don't! don't! If you love me, don't!" answered Nattie, imploringly.

"Do you know?" asked Whitelaw, with a wondering look.

"My heart whispers something!" gasped Nathalia.

"Think of it—think of it! I will await your answer, here, to-morrow."

"I am held back," replied Nathalia, with a shudder.

"I must live near you!" said Whitelaw, solemnly.

"I will be your child—your submissive, loving child! Let your thoughts rest there."

Both involuntarily glanced at Tawny.

"It is the hand of God!" murmured Nattie.

"Perhaps—perhaps!" exclaimed Whitelaw, painfully affected. "To-morrow—come to-morrow."

He made a motion, as if to stretch his hand over the child's head, but checked the impulse suddenly and with a tremor, then turned and dashed into the woods.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHITELAW AND BERNARD.

Bernard was at the lodge when Nathalia returned. He noticed that she was unusually thoughtful. She averted her eyes when he looked at her, and was embarrassed.

"Nathalia," he said, "do you remember the night when we met for the first time?"

"I can never, never forget it!" she answered, with an involuntary start.

"Neither can I! On that night I loved you," added Bernard, in a tone half melancholy, half reflective.

Nattie's cheeks glowed, and she was silent.

"Your face has been before me ever since," he resumed. "Every pursuit, but that of you, has grown distasteful. But one word rings in my ears, and that is, Nathalia! I blessed the chance that waded me to this island. When I first came, I was happy. I was content in being near you, and my society seemed to give you pleasure. Now all is changed; you have become reserved and silent. Nathalia, you conceal something from me! You have a secret that troubles you."

"Bernard! Bernard! do not talk to me! Your words disturb me!" she exclaimed, quite agitated.

"And should they not disturb you?" cried Bernard, with warmth. "You have withdrawn your confidence from me; you have bestowed it upon one nearly twice my age. He is comparatively a stranger to you, and you have given him stolen interviews in the woods."

"What do you say, Bernard?" she asked, with a conscious blush.

"I have discovered your secret. Whitelaw is on the island! You will not—you cannot deny it!"

"No; I will not!" murmured Nathalia, painfully confused.

"Why did you not confide in me as in a

brother? In me, who would do anything for you? Nathalia, you have wounded me! I can never be happy."

"Forgive me, Bernard!" sighed the girl.

"What right had he to this happiness?" exclaimed the young man, angrily. "How did he deserve you more than I? I will find him; I will tell him to his face that he is not worthy of you! Let him resent it, if he dares! A quarrel will be to my liking."

Bernard frowned, and fixed his eyes moodily upon the ground.

"How wretched I am!" said Nathalia, looking earnestly at him. "I must have done something very wicked to make you so angry. You will never forgive me. I am sure I think a great deal of you. You have been in my mind ever since we met at Ralph's cabin."

"I have little right to complain," returned Bernard, more mildly. "I love you, it is true; but the right to choose is yours. But such a choice! O Nathalia! Can you be happy with this man? Have you considered the difference in your ages?"

"You are going too far, Bernard. You take all for granted. The relationship you speak of has never been mentioned between us," answered Nathalia, somewhat sharply.

"Ay! but it has been hinted at! At least, it has been secretly understood by you. Your confusion tells me that you have anticipated his wishes."

"You take liberties with me! What can I do? There is no one to advise me." She looked troubled and anxious.

"Nay, I would advise you."

"Yes; you would advise me to love you!" cried Nathalia, with a sudden flash of anger.

"Men are selfish; and you are selfish, too, Bernard!"

"Where Nathalia is concerned, I am selfish," replied the young man.

"Yes. You slander Whitelaw; you would prejudice me against him! But he has been more generous; he has never spoken ill of you. On the contrary, he has been earnest in your praise. What does he get for it?"

She looked at Bernard reproachfully. He had never heard her speak so haughtily before.

"My hatred, I am afraid!" he muttered.

"Is it just to hate one who is your friend?"

"Ah! you love him! retorted Bernard, sarcastically.

"Well, if I love him? What then?" demanded Nathalia, vexed at the persistency of Bernard.

"Nothing, nothing!" he replied, moodily.

"Only I must see him. Yes, I must see him. We can arrange it, I think, so you will have but one lover on the island!"

Bernard caught Owen's rifle from the side of the lodge against which it was placed, and was going.

"What do you mean?" cried Nathalia, greatly alarmed. "You would not kill him?"

"I am not an assassin!" he retorted, avoiding her glances.

"And yet you seek provocation for a quarrel. There is a deadly purpose in your mind. If such a dreadful thing should happen, my life would be miserable forever!"

She took him by the arm, and looked imploringly into his face. There was both fear and tenderness in her eyes. Within her there was a terrible conflict. Which of these two men did she love? This startling query forced itself upon her so powerfully, that she could not resist it. That moment revealed to her her true position.

"No, no! Do not believe it; if any one is to suffer, it is me. Let me go, Nathalia! The touch of your hands shakes my purpose. Turn away those eyes, too; keep their tenderness for Whitelaw!"

"Cruel, cruel!" exclaimed Nattie, with spirit.

Bernard stood outside the lodge. Nathalia's pride was touched; she ceased to implore him, and went within.

Bernard Ross walked away, with a feeling of bitter disappointment upon him. He believed Nathalia was lost to him, and his resentment turned against Whitelaw as the author of his unhappiness. That man appeared to be his evil genius. He had distrusted his influence upon Nathalia from the first; his suspicion was now resolved into certainty. Why had fate brought him to the island? Why could he not have been left to the uninterrupted enjoyment of Nattie's society? Regret, jealousy, and anger tossed him to and fro. He strode on faster and faster. He was in the worst of all moods to see Whitelaw; but it was written that they should meet. He

saw him standing beneath a tree, his arms crossed upon his chest, his eyes downcast, his whole attitude indicating a profound state of reverie. The sound of Bernard's footsteps, even, did not arouse him. The young man spoke.

"I am happy to find you. I have been looking for you some days," he said, in a tone not the most conciliating.

"It is of little consequence who finds me," answered Whitelaw, abstractedly, without raising his eyes.

"That is to be determined," continued Bernard, curtly.

"You seek some other person, doubtless?" returned Whitelaw, indifferently. "No one has any business with me. I don't live in your world, young man."

"I must inform you," said Bernard, quickly and imperiously, "that I have business with you; business, too, of the utmost importance, which cannot be delayed or put off by any pretext."

Whitelaw raised his eyebrows, and turned to Bernard, as if he had just discovered his presence.

"Excuse me," he said, "I believe I have been absent. You observed that you had business with me, did you not? Let me hear it."

Bernard paused; he felt that it was a difficult and awkward matter to broach; but he did not long hesitate.

"I have come to speak of Nathalia."

"Of Nathalia!" exclaimed Whitelaw.

"You have understood me," said Bernard, coldly.

"Well, what have you to say of Nathalia?" demanded the other, with a slight contraction of the brows.

"I wish to know your intentions respecting her?" he replied, with dogged determination.

Whitelaw looked at Bernard Ross some time.

"Ah! I see how it is! You are jealous," he returned, quietly.

"My question was a plain one," said Bernard.

"Plain enough, I grant; we will not ask whether it was impertinent. Some men might not choose to answer such a demand. However, there is no reason why I should not be frank with you. You ask my intentions. Honestly, I do not know."

Whitelaw spoke like one who was thinking of the matter candidly.

"You do not know!" exclaimed the young man, flashing up.

"You come secretly to this island; you have stolen interviews in the woods; you haunt this little spot like a phantom! Yet you tell me that you do not know!"

"Are you Nathalia's guardian?" Whitelaw asked, with a smile.

"You may treat this as a jest, if you will," returned the younger man, with a menacing look, "but I think you'll find it quite serious."

"You cannot frighten me, boy!" Whitelaw answered, somewhat haughtily. "He who threatens me, cannot know my character."

"I threaten no man; but it is time that we understand each other."

"One of us, at least, will not be hard to comprehend!" retorted Whitelaw, with a shrug.

"I came not to try my wits with you," replied Bernard.

"I think you did not bring them!" responded he of the cynical face, sarcastically.

"I have brought this."

Bernard pointed to his weapon.

"You would quarrel with me, young man: But you have no cause; I have done you no wrong. You love Nathalia. It is well. Urge your suit with her; you have every opportunity. You are near her person; you are sheltered in the same lodge. Use every art of persuasion. Show yourself worthy of the prize. I will be the last man to throw an obstacle in your way. She shall choose between us. If I woo her, it shall be like an honorable man."

"Your magnanimity comes late, and with an ill grace," responded Bernard, with bitterness.

"One would suppose that you had passed the age of gallantry, but such an opinion does you great injustice."

"You have not touched the galled spot," said Whitelaw, without the least resentment. "My age does not trouble me."

"This matter," resumed the younger man, in a lower tone, "might be adjusted so that she would have but one lover on the island. It will save her the trouble of a choice."

The speaker raised his cap and wiped his flushed forehead.

"Is your purpose so deadly?" asked Whitelaw, with earnestness.

"Put whatever construction you please upon my words," answered Ross, sullenly.

"You would make death the arbiter in this case. Think you, young man, that Nathalia will take your hand with blood upon it? Would she love you better for having taken the life of a fellow-being? Go, sir, and learn wisdom!"

"I have learned much of that during a few days' residence here. I perceive you are not willing that Nathalia should have one lover the less. Well, prudence is sometimes better than courage."

"I forgive the innuendo. You do not know the man to whom you direct these taunts. I am like a limb torn from its parent trunk, and cast to and fro on the waters. Misfortune has made me a butt to shoot at. I stand aloof from my fellow-men. Once, I believed I should never see a human creature to love. But this child has touched my heart."

"Forbear! forbear! This is the language which fascinates a young girl. Your years are not gone for nothing. You have learned to play on human sympathies. We shall meet again. If you are a hypocrite, I will unmask you. If you are what you seem, I cannot be your friend. No, no! Nathalia is between us. She separates us as widely as earth and sky."

"Young man, you are mad! Go away and recover your senses. I am not your enemy."

"It is false! He who loves Nathalia, is my enemy!"

"When you are calmer, I will talk with you. I cannot reason with an angry man. I decline the duel that you offer; not because I fear to meet you, but from feelings of humanity. I shrink from crime, and would spare you the commission of one. Maidens are not won by pistol and rifle. When you are cool, you will see the folly and wickedness of your proposal."

"Never! never!" muttered Bernard. Looking up presently, he perceived that Whitelaw had gone. He had glided away silently.

CHAPTER XXII.

BAD SIGNS.

At the time Kid Kerly and Neil Travis left the miner's cabin, Ralph Quimby and his comrade were not far off, hidden in the bushes; for there were numberless coverts in the abundant foliage of the Ten Miles Trace. Indeed, an army might have been concealed there, provided an old mountaineer like Kid did not put himself upon the trail.

The surprise of the miners, upon seeing Neil come forth with the trapper, was great, and of no pleasant character. They looked at each other in alarm.

"Here is mischief," said Ralph.

"Danger!" muttered Nat Stratton.

"That mountaineer can follow a squirrel-track," added Ralph, uneasily. "Depend upon it, Nat, he is after us. I like not this. Neil Travis would not be off his bed, unless something of more than usual importance had aroused him."

"He can't do much harm, I reckon, on account of them ugly marks that we give him. He can't walk without pain."

"Pain? A spirit like his will conquer pain. I have looked into his eyes, and know him. Let us follow them at a distance," said Ralph.

"Follow it is! Have you anything in your flask? Mine is empty, but my nerves are still shaking."

They moved slowly after the two men, and finally saw them enter the pine thicket where they stopped for the night.

"Is it not singular," queried Ralph, "that they camp near the old copper-mines?"

Stratton did not answer. His eyes were downcast, his manner gloomy.

"Why don't you speak? Why do you mope and muse in this stupid way?" added Ralph, petulantly.

"I'm thinkin' of the lake shore," replied Stratton, abstractedly. "I'll wager a bag of gold that Kid Kerly has tracked us there! Something seems to tell me so. Blood, you know, can't be covered up, when it's unfairly shed. Everybody says that."

"Nat, you are not the man you was!" sneered the other.

"I never shall be ag'in. I wish I'd never seen your niece, Ralph! Nor you either, for that matter; nor the cursed mines! I tell ye that that tough old mountaineer shoots plum' centre! I can almost feel the sights on me, now."

Ralph himself was impressed by the hopeless mood of Stratton. He felt how devious and harassing is the road of crime, and how heaven

hedges up the way of the transgressor, and places an accusing angel at every turn. He realized how sweet would be the innocence of childhood. He resisted these softer waves of thought.

"We need courage and cunning," he said, presently. "Have we not both? Come, let us to the mine. When there, we will decide what to do."

Quimby led the way silently, and Nat followed him, wrapt in his own gloomy thoughts. Reaching the shaft, they drew the long ladder from the brakes where it was concealed, lowered it, and descended. Ralph was the first to reach the ground.

"What means this?" he muttered. "There's no light here! Has the girl let it go out? We left oil enough to burn a fortnight."

"Women always bring bad luck," answered Stratton. "Push along, and strike a light; for I hate darkness; I fear to see something in it that will terrify me."

"Nothing worse than yourself!" said Ralph, feeling his way on. "The fire is entirely out, too," he added, stumbling over the brands. "Miss Danton—Mary Danton!"

Nothing but echo responded. Ralph raised his voice; he shouted "Mary Danton" again and again. The vaulted arches took up the call mockingly, and the name rolled resonantly this way and that, as though a hundred genii had mouthed it.

"Find a lamp!" cried Ralph, angrily. "Can't you do anything, Nat?"

"They're gone, by —!" growled the latter. "It's a lie! You don't know what you're about! See how quick I'll put my hands on 'em!"

Ralph groped over every inch of the spot where the lamps were invariably placed when they left the mine. A volley of oaths announced his want of success and disappointment. Then echo swore afar off in the black passages.

"The mine is full of devils!" said Stratton, nervously.

"She's playing us a trick!" grumbled Ralph. "Come out, Miss Danton, come out! Don't hide any longer. The joke is a good one, if you don't make it last too long."

Mary Danton did not come to end the jest.

"These girls are full of tricks," complained Quimby. "Damn the echoes!"

Echo faithfully reiterated Ralph's last sentiment.

"Bah!" grunted the miner; and set himself to gathering the brands, preparatory to kindling a fire. After much muttering and ill-temper, a little blue flame appeared, which, being carefully nursed and supplied with fagots, blazed up brilliantly.

"Throw me a blanket to sit on," said Quimby. "I'm tired."

"Find 'em, will ye?" was the laconic and meaning response.

"Gone!" cried Ralph, glancing at the spot where the heap of blankets should have been.

"The work of your pretty prize!" sneered Nat. "We shall get along nicely in this way. She'll be a valuable housekeeper. You see what comes of keepin' her."

"Don't complain, comrade. I've set my mind on her, the same as you have on Nattie."

"I wish you joy of her!"

"Well, well, 'tisn't best to take it seriously. After we've eaten a mouthful, we'll take some brands from the fire and hunt her up. She's only playing hide-and-seek with us. I'd rather have her playful than sulky."

Quimby went to his subterranean closet to bring forth those viands so welcome to a hungry man, and of which he had reason to suppose he should find a plentiful supply. His astonishment was not a little enhanced when his eyes fell on the empty shelves, and wandered up and down the vacant niche. Stratton exulted in his chagrin.

"'Tis an excellent jest, indeed!" he said, with a coarse laugh. "What a playful thing it is!"

Ralph caught a blazing fagot from the fire, and began to search the various windings of the mine in a singular hurry and trepidation. With a sardonic smile, Stratton seized another torch and accompanied him. They explored every recess; they thrust their torches into nooks and corners where a weasel couldn't hide; they shouted till they were hoarse; and not satisfied, ran over the same ground again and again.

"A pretty business!" grumbled Stratton, casting his dying brand into the fire from which he had taken it.

"Escaped!" said Ralph, in dismay. "Some one has been 'here.'"

"I don't know how anybody could get down or up without a ladder," answered Stratton,

"A rope, perhaps," suggested Ralph. "Somebody may have heard her cries, and drawn her up with a rope."

"It don't seem possible; she'd been torn and lacerated on the pointed rocks, while swingin' in air like a pendulum."

"One thing is true," answered Ralph, spitefully, "if she's gone, our secret's gone with her."

"You want to provoke me," returned Nat.

"It's the simple truth! When I returned to the mine yesterday morning, alone, I found her in our diggings, with a handful of earth, examining the bright, yellow particles; which were no brighter than she, for she knew what it was. I tell you this, that you may see the importance of getting her back again."

"Everything goes wrong!" exclaimed Nat, with an oath. "If you'd taken my advice, you'd turned her adrift as soon as we found out our mistake. Somebody would have picked her up, I dare say."

"I tell ye, Nat Stratton, that she pleased me! I'd rather lose all my hoards of gold than Mary Danton. You would give everything for Nathalia; I would barter everything for Mary."

"I'm not the only madman, then. Well, misery loves company. I hope you'll be as miserable as I; that you will feel all the pains and tortures I have felt; that you'll have no rest night nor day; that you will be disappointed at last! That's my prayer for you!"

The man laughed hoarsely. Ralph widened the distance between them. Both were silent a long time.

"I didn't strike very hard—did I?" muttered Stratton, by-and-by. "A blow like that couldn't kill a person. There was no blood on the stick. He was alive when he drifted away. A boat may have picked him up; people do get picked up, sometimes, on the water. Do you remember how he looked back, Ralph?"

"Won't you let me alone?" snarled Quimby.

"I dread to go to sleep. What I do in the daytime is always done over again in my dreams," added Nat, in a subdued voice.

"We've something more to do than dream. We must get away from here and break the trail. If 'twasn't for Kid Kerly and Travis, I shouldn't be much concerned. We must hide. There must be a good strip of water between us and the mountaineer. Before morning, Nat, we must be on one of the islands, out in the lake."

"It's the most reasonable thing you've said," replied the other, quickly. "Kid and the double-sights haunt me. I don't want anybody after me that shoots plum' centre, I don't. Keep out o' danger when you can. That's my way!"

Perfectly agreed upon this method of evading pursuit, the miners left the shaft, disposed of the ladder as usual, struck out for Lake Superior, traversing, as much as possible, the highest and driest ground, and observing great care to leave a faint and undistinguishable trail.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RAFT.

Arrived at the lake, the two fugitives set themselves to work to build a raft. With axes which they had brought for the purpose, they felled some dry trees and lashed them together. Men never worked more industriously. With Nat Stratton, in particular, it was a terribly-earnest business. A great dread of Kid Kerly had fallen upon him. More than once he paused in the midst of his labors and declared that he heard footsteps. Ralph vainly endeavored to quiet his anxiety. The voice of conscience was stronger than the assurances of his companion. He betrayed in every action a nervous haste that told how completely his sense of security had gone. He worked like a maniac till the raft was complete, then pushed it from the shore with trembling haste. The wind was in their favor; and they hoped, by the aid of some clumsy paddles which they had hurriedly made, to reach one of the little islands in the lake in a couple of hours.

At first they floated on very well, and without any exertion. Stratton experienced such a sense of relief that he lay down on the raft and went to sleep. The stars and the moon beamed upon the waters. Ralph imagined he could see the islands looming up through the dim, soft haze. He kept solitary watch, occasionally guiding the motions of the raft with his paddle, keeping it dead before the wind. Stratton presently awoke, shivering and muttering.

"What's the matter?" asked his companion. "Dreams—dreams—nothin' but dreams! I know what'll happen."

"That for dreams!" replied Ralph, snapping his thumb and fingers.

"It's no use talkin'!" continued the other, gloomily. "It'll come; sooner or later it'll come. I shall be shot plum' centre."

"Nonsense!" said Quimby.

"It may be nonsense to you, but it isn't to me," answered Stratton, dismally. "Things come to people, sometimes. I don't know *where* they come from, but come they do. I want you to remember what I say. Don't try to reason me out of it, for you can't. I tell ye I shall be shot plum' centre!"

"It is but a passing freak of fancy. You are wanting in pluck, Nat."

"I've got courage enough, but I know when I'm spoke to. If I never see Nathalia again, tell her I knowd it was comin'. Tell her, too, that it was the love of her that made me wicked. I don't know what kind of love 'tis; perhaps it isn't the right kind. I dare say not."

"The wind is rising. See! the water begins to dash over the raft. Is that an island yonder?" asked Ralph, suddenly.

"No, it's a cloud—a black cloud low down the sky."

"We must be looking about us. I shouldn't like to be driven out upon this fresh-water sea."

"It don't disturb me at all," replied Nat, sepulchrally. "I shall be neither drowned nor hanged. If I's to drift a week on Lake Superior, I should live to be shot plum' centre!"

"I've half a mind to throw you overboard!" retorted Ralph, angrily. "I will, if you don't stop your croaking."

"You might throw me over twenty times, and I should come up again and float like a cork. No, no, Ralph! that kind of an end isn't for me. Them deadly sights will cover me, sooner or later."

"Drink, man, drink!" sneered Ralph, handing him the large flask containing spirit. "Drown yourself in rum, if you can't in water. Do anything but be a foreboding fool! Why! I'd rather have the ghost of Bernard Ross than such a phantom as you."

Stratton's lips were glued to the flask, and he made no response.

"The wind is driving after us like a race-horse!" added Ralph, in tones of apprehension.

"Let it drive!" replied the other, getting upon his feet and looking defiantly at the now lowering heavens. "Blow! blow!" he shouted. "What harm can ye do one like me? I'm not your game. Ha, ha! I have the advantage of the elements to-night. The devil'll keep me for the double-sights of Kid Kerly!"

The raft was now in such violent motion that Stratton was thrown upon his face and obliged to cling to the lashings of the logs, to prevent being washed away.

"Get up and paddle for life! We're passing the islands!" cried Ralph, trying to govern the direction of the raft; but the waves were so strong and impetuous, that his paddle was nearly wrenched from his grasp, and he found as much as he could do in retaining his seat. He would gladly have exchanged the raft for the copper-mine, but it was now too late to choose. The rush and roar of waters was around them, and they were hurried on. Ralph thought of Bernard Ross, borne from the shore by just such a wind, and tossed by just such billows.

"This is like retribution—isn't it?" said Stratton, raising his voice above the din of the surging waves. "We're havin' a merry ride, Ralph! Ah, ha! ah, ha! I dare say you'll be drowned; but there's no fear of me. There's a mortgage on me. It's a good thing to be safe in a storm. You sit there, awed by the waves and winds; but I hold them in derision."

"You're a maniac! I should feel better without you. If we ever reach shore alive, you and I part company forever. I won't have such a raven about me."

"If I'm mad, you made me mad!" shrieked Stratton. "You turned my head with Nathalia! You bought my secret with Nathalia! With Nathalia you made me a murderer! This is the fruit of your own hands; enjoy it. That's my way!"

The raft surged on and on. The wind howled more fiercely, and the waters hissed and boiled. The tumult of the billows was frightful. Hours passed. They ceased to speak to each other, and clung desperately to their frail support. The thunder of waves nearly stunned them.

The morning came at last—slowly and drearily it came. The sun arose; it rolled up the eastern ascent, pouring its hot rays upon the miners' heads. The wind had lulled, and the lake was gradually becoming calm. Ralph and his comrade looked anxiously around; the

shore, where it could be seen at all, looked like a low, dark bank of fog.

"We shall starve!" said Ralph.

"You may starve, but I sha'n't!" replied Nat, doggedly.

"The same miserable, uncomfortable, eternal idea! A cat or a dog, a monkey or an ape, were a better companion. I am glad that Nathalia has escaped a fool!"

"Don't press a man who is already beset by invisible foes," answered Stratton, arising, and looking threateningly at Quimby. "A good many thoughts come into a person's mind under circumstances like these, and if some of 'em are dangerous, whose fault is it? How long do you s'pose a man would float on these disturbed waters?"

The speaker glared wildly at his comrade.

"I don't know," said the latter, mechanically, while a new fear seized him.

"Nor I; but I feel an unconquerable desire to find out," returned Stratton, musingly. "Are you strong, Ralph?"

"As a tiger!"

Quimby watched every movement of his dangerous associate in crime.

"So much the better! You'll struggle longer. As the raft floats from you, you will glance back at me as Bernard did. I never shall forget that look! Say your prayers, Ralph; I'm goin' to throw you in!"

"Down, idiot!" vociferated Ralph. "Don't you see that I have both guns beside me?"

"But they are drenched with water; the powder is wet. Ha! ha! I have you, Ralph."

"You reckon too fast, madman! I have something here that is dry and sure." He drew a revolver from the breast-pocket of his coat. "Do you see this? Down, and be quiet! I have the advantage, but I shall not use it. You have no power to harm me. Without me, you can never see Nathalia; without me, you will have committed crime for nothing! Save your strength; you'll need it. The chances are as ten to one against us. God only knows how long we shall broil here in the sun, and starve, and drift about. Be calm, crazy brute—be calm!"

Quimby approached Stratton boldly; laid his hand on his back; patted him as he would a sullen dog; touched his cold forehead with the tips of his fingers; looked steadily into his wandering eyes; whispered the name of Nathalia; adding, in a soothing tone: "Be quiet, comrade, be quiet! You've had a dream; a bad, bad dream. You've harmed no one; it was a miserable vagary, growing out of the tumult and thunder of the waters. Do you hear me, Nat? I say you have dreamed, and nothing more. You'll do very well, by-and-by. We're taking a pleasant voyage; we're floating to a green island to see Nattie. Ah! don't you see the shore? How beautiful the foliage is! Birds begin to sing. Hark! is not that the voice of Nathalia?"

Stratton's eyelids trembled; a tremor went over him; his eyes grew milder; he threw himself on his face upon the raft, sobbed and moaned faintly, and finally lay very still.

Ralph went back to his place, and sat there hopelessly, while the sun passed the meridian and went glittering and glowing to the west. A fog settled upon the lake, which made the night intensely dark. The wind began to blow again, but not so fiercely, and the two faint and miserable voyagers tossed drearily and despairingly upon the billows.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HALF REMEMBERED.

Whitelaw, after his interview with Bernard, sought the deepest seclusion of the island. He believed himself quite alone, and was thinking of what had just passed, when a pale and haggard object approached and called him by name. Whitelaw did not at once recognize the voice and countenance, but a closer inspection relieved all doubt; it was Ralph Quimby. He had greatly changed since he and Whitelaw had last met.

"What has happened?" the latter inquired. "You look like a devotee after forty days' fast."

"I have reason to! I have had a long voyage on a raft. Some four days ago, Nat Stratton and I thought to reach one of the little islands near the shore, on some logs lashed together. The wind blew us away, and we've had a horrible time."

"Have you been without food so long?"

"Not so bad as that. Two days since, we drifted upon the island nearest this, where we found some eggs and killed some birds, which

we devoured raw. This morning, thinking we might perhaps fare better, and this island being nearer the shore, we got our raft afloat and contrived to paddle it here, though it cost us a deal of labor. If you have anything fit for Christians to eat, make haste to give it to me."

"Where is your comrade?"

"Stretched on the shore, like a swine! The fact is, suffering has unsettled his reason."

"Wait here," said Whitelaw; and immediately left Ralph. He walked some distance before stopping; then lifting the thick boughs of a low pine, went under them and disappeared. He came out again, presently, bringing some food, with which he returned to Quimby, who led him to the spot where he had left Stratton. They found him lying on the ground in a stupid sleep. Ralph shook him roughly. Seeing Whitelaw, he would have fled; for his terrors made him take, for a moment, the form of Kid Kerly. Perceiving his mistake, he affected to laugh, and accounted for the vagary by saying that he had been dreaming of the mountaineer. He ate heartily of the food that Whitelaw had brought, and appeared quite rational. Ralph and the latter went aside and conversed.

"Might I take the liberty of asking your object in visiting one of the islands?" Whitelaw asked.

Ralph Quimby was not prepared for this question, but he soon had a plausible answer.

"I didn't know," he replied, "but my niece might have been carried there by her abductors."

"There are several islands?"

"I intended to visit them all," said the miner.

"Have you heard anything of Nathalia?" Whitelaw continued.

Ralph glanced at the interrogator.

"I have not," he answered. "Have you had any better success?"

Ralph's eyes had now much of their former fire and intensity. His gaze did not wander for an instant from the composed features of Whitelaw.

"I have made no particular efforts to find your niece," he said, impassively.

"And you know nothing concerning her?"

"I have nothing to communicate," returned Whitelaw, quietly.

"Nothing to communicate!" repeated Ralph, whose haggard features began to be animated with new life. The muscles of his mouth twitched convulsively.

Whitelaw was studying the man with an inquisitiveness for which he could not himself account.

"Do you know," he said, bending forward a little upon his rifle, "that an odd fancy comes over me? You look like one who has been, is, or should be, my enemy."

The hollow cheeks of Ralph flushed feverishly. His breast heaved with emotion. He respired with difficulty. He dared not trust his voice to speak. The bitterness that was in him wanted vent; but expression would destroy the completeness of his purpose. Ah, that purpose! Ralph forgot the dangers he had passed—the wind, the waves, the darkness, the fear of death, and the horror of remorse, and how his sins had followed him on the lake, the half-formed prayer, and the incipient resolve of a better life. All, all was swept away! The sweetness of retaliation; the unholy satisfaction of inflicting pain for a suppositious injury; the unnatural desire to see one he hated, crushed, humiliated, shocked, trodden into the mire of conscious calamity, swept away and triumphed over every redeeming thought. The image of a beautiful woman, who loved him not, stood before him in his heated fancy.

"What follies and fancies pursue us!" added Whitelaw. "What impossibilities we conjure into existence! What unrealities we make! The mind is a magician, Ralph Quimby. You make me think of an unhappy being, who went back to great mother Earth years ago. Now, isn't it strange that you, standing here before me, should fill my brain with vague and unnamable fears? That you should call into action and palpability scenes, persons, and situations, that, so far as I know, have not the remotest connection with you? Is it the sound of a voice, the gleam of an eye, the turn of a face, the rounding of a muscle, the chance-play of features, that recall both my happiness and my misery?"

Ralph slowly revolved on his heels; he turned his face from Whitelaw. A thousand, thousand distracting thoughts shook him. All, all depended upon this fraction of time. Should he fall at this man's feet, and confess his sins against him? His better angel was wrestling

with him, and would have given him a fall so that he would have "halted" evermore in the valley of humility. Unfortunately, just then he saw the face of Nat Stratton, with all its old wickedness and ferocity upon it; the evil of his nature communicated like dry tinder with the soul of the hesitating, conscience-stricken Ralph. He was transformed. He scorned the voice that called him; he said to Repentance: "Go thy way till a more convenient season." And the meek-eyed spirit went. His demon whirled him back eye to eye with Whitelaw.

"I'm a plain man," he said—he began hoarsely, but his voice grew clearer—"I can't comprehend what you say."

It was a foul and heaven-daring lie. He comprehended all—and more than was said.

"You seemed moved, and yet I know not why you should be affected, in any manner, by my drifting thoughts," answered Whitelaw, mournfully.

"Let us speak of Nathalia," said Ralph, almost in a whisper.

"It is a name musical to my ears! I had rather other lips had a right to speak of her; but I suppose this must inevitably be." Whitelaw looked down and sighed.

"If you love her," continued Ralph, still speaking low, and not daring to encounter the gaze of the other, "there is no need that you should hide her away. If you want her, she is yours."

His tones had the ring of honesty.

"I ought to thank you for such words as these," rejoined Whitelaw, "but the impulse of gratitude is not so strong upon me as I could wish it. She is sweet, she is good, she is beautiful!"

"And yours," added Ralph, "if you will it."

"An invisible force holds me back!"

"It holds you from a treasure, then, and I can only say, follow your own honorable impulses."

"Miner, I may have done you injustice; if I have, I trust you will not remember it to my hurt. We met under peculiar circumstances."

"Let bygones be bygones. You cannot visit my sins upon her?" answered Ralph, deprecatingly.

"Nor shall I. I will reflect upon what you have said. Nathalia shall choose or reject."

"She is on this island?"

The remark was interrogative rather than affirmative.

"Let us separate now; we will discuss this subject further at another time. Remain on this part of the island, if remain you must. I will supply you with food. Do not wander about. To-morrow we will decide this interesting question. Are you content?"

"I am; I will neither press nor follow you."

So they separated.

CHAPTER XXV.

DISCOVERIES.

Neil Travis slept but little that night in the thicket of pines. The thought of Mary Danton haunted him. Before morning he aroused Kid Kerly.

"I can't rest," said Neil. "I don't think I shall ever rest till I settle this question about Mary Danton."

"No doubt but that's your idee. That was pooty much my case when I's in love with that red sweetness that arterward become Mrs. Kid. There was loveliness for ye! Sich a figger was never afore known. And then that face o' hers! Why, it was all sunshine, and nighabout the same color; specially when the sun's uncommon red. I used to dream of her when I's trappin' in the howlin' wilderness, and more'n one is the nightmare I've had on her account. I's precious afeard somebody'd git her away from me; and that was partly what made me uncomfortable."

"So you've felt the power of beauty, mountaineer?"

"I have, true's you live! If I ha'n't, I never felt nothin'."

"Well, how did it end?"

"In matrimony—in the real, giniwine, right-down, old-fashioned matrimony! I was a trifle older nor she was; but her affections was sot on me as firm as if I'd been no more nor twenty. She was a faithful critter—Milly was."

"Is she dead?"

"Not as I knows on. She and our little gal was stole away by a band of thievin' Blackfeet, about two year ago. I have'n't clapped eyes on her since, though I've looked high and low, and follered the red niggurs like a shadder. But I ha'n't give it up yet; I'm goin' down to the settlements to git a new outfit, and start ag'in."

"You seem to be tolerably reconciled to your loss," added Neil.

"If you could see the in'ard natur' of this loss, you'd find anything but reconciliation. No, no! there's some'at that disturbs me yet. I've vowed to find Milly and her child afore I go under. If I don't, some ha'r'll be lifted, that's clear! I shoot plum' centre. Wah!"

"Let's be movin', comrade. I suffer more from inaction than I should from the severest exercise."

The mountaineer willingly assented to this proposition, and they proceeded toward the mines. When they were near them, they were surprised to hear the sound of a human voice.

"Sorrah a bit o' comfort, your riverence, shall we get in this howlin' wilderness! As for the goold, or the silver, or the copper, or the iron, lead, or other precious mitals that they make sich a mighty philaloo about, it isn't one word in tin that I belaves in the whole of it!"

To this complaint the following answer was made:

"Hold up there, Barney, and don't be talking of your troubles. Cut some fresh fuel, and rouse up the fire, man. Our situation isn't half so bad as you make it. I've slept many times in the woods, alone, with nothing but a blanket to cover me; that often happened when I was missionary among the Indians. Ah, Barney! this bit of a tramp is just sport compared with my adventures among the savages. I've been, too, on the Mexican border, and pursued my solitary way from mission to mission, when my scalp wasn't safe on my head."

"It was a nadeless timptin' o' providence, your riverence! In my humble opinion, Father Brady, the safest place is iver the best. Sez I to myself, allys, Barney Powers, kape yourself out o' danger. Don't go for to git yourself into throuble by runnin' afther this notion, and runnin' afther that. You'd better give me absolution jist here; for shure I'll be devoured by the bastes o' the field, or murdered by the howlin' savages o' the woods. Och hone! och hone!"

"If some evil should happen to ye, Barney, it wouldn't be no great wonder, you're such an ungrateful, murmuring, cowardly lad. Cut your ticks, and think less of your mortal body."

"It's evil that you wouldn't wonder would come upon me! Eroo! eroo! Is it to me you're spakin'? What could happen to me worse nor this?"

Barney's voice was now partially drowned by the strokes of his axe; for it was evident to the listeners that he was in quest of wood to replenish their fire. A great cry from Barney presently followed.

"Murther! murther! Come here, your riverence! See what kind of a counthry is this, where the mud-holes are deeper nor a well."

"What now, Barney?"

"What now, bedad! Isn't it a howl that you could put a church intil it, that I have diskivered? The howly virgin herself must have houlded me back, or I should have tumbled into the muchness of it, and you'd never seen Barney Bowers no more. O wisha, wisha!"

They he the person addressed as Father Brady arise and approach Barney.

"You're a great blockhead, Barney Powers!" he said. "This is a mine, and not a mud-hole!"

"Yours, is it? Faix and I'm glad it isn't mine; for I should be in dread of me life to be the owner of such a decateful bit o' property!" replied Barney, emphatically.

"I didn't say it was mine, you bogtrotter! I meant that it was a copper-mine," laughed Father Brady.

"Wisha, it's a copper-mine, is it? Faix, I'm glad it's no worse! for I should look upon your riverence as little better nor a fool, had ye invisted your money in a howl like that, which ye couldn't use nor take away wid ye, which is nayther fit for a cellar, nor a hog-pin, nor an under-pinnin' to a church! A copper-mine, ye say? Now, I can jist see as fur intil it as your riverence, but niver a bit o' copper can I set my two eyes on."

Father Brady broke into a merry laugh; a laugh round, clear, and jolly.

"Come away, you North-of-Ireland black-guard! It's little that you know of copper-mines, or anything else, for that matter," he said, in a voice as good-humored as his laughter.

"I wonder, Barney Bogtrotter, that you know enough to peel a potatoe before swallowing it."

"Arrah, your riverence! It's in a tinder spot ye're touchin' me now. Sorrah a peratie have I peeled these two weeks, for the raison that I couldn't git 'em; and it all comes of wan-

derin' about with your riverence jist with no object, at all, at all, in view."

At that moment Kid Kerly and Neil Travis came forward and showed themselves.

"Howly mother of God!" exclaimed Barney. "Here's the red nagurs themselves! Take to your hailes, Father Brady, if ye cares a ha'penny worth for your scalp; for, bedad, they'll skin your head afore ye can say as much as the devil take ye!"

Barney dropped his axe, and started off upon a nimble run. He floundered through the bushes like a buffalo.

"Come back here, you wild Irishman!" shouted Kerly. "Don't you know an Injun from a white Christian?"

It was not without difficulty that the headlong career of Barney was stopped. He finally trusted himself within parleying distance.

"Jist spake a blissid word, your riverence, if you're dead intirely; but if you're alive, I won't put your riverence to the trouble, for that's all I'm afther wantin' to find out, which 'll set my heart at ease."

"There's nothin' to fear," answered Father Brady. "These are not savages, but white men."

"It's little, mayhap, that your riverence has to fear," added Barney, returning slowly; "for, come to think iv it, sorrah a scalp has ye to lose, your head bein' smooth as the back o' me land."

"How d'ye do, hoss?" said Kerly, amicably.

"Wah!" replied Father Brady, extending his hand.

"Traps and trapsacks!" cried the mountaineer, in a tone of surprise. "If 'tisn't Father Brady, I don't know hind-sights from fore-sights! I'm glad to see ye. What in the world are you so near the clearin's for? Ha'n't fell from grace, have ye? Don't mean to cheat the poor heathen out o' the skin o' your head, do ye? Haven't deserted the mountains, I hope?"

"No; I've only been down to Mackinaw to take an airing. I just wanted to see civilization again, and then go back contented to my labors. Hearing strange stories about gold being found on this side of the lake, and weary of a month's residence in the clearings, I took a stroll up this way, for recreation, as well as to satisfy my curiosity. I have with me my new servant, Barney Powers, who don't know a copper-mine from a mud-hole. Now you've heard my simple story, tell me what brings you here?"

"I confess to much the same feelin' that made you take this long jaunt. I wanted to see, too, the improvements in rifles, pistols, and other weepens, and try some experierments with the powder they're makin' nowadays. I shall be ready to go back, soon. Neil Travis, this is Father Brady—as good a Catholic as every trod shoe-leather. Father Brady spliced Milly and I; and he did it right solemn and beautiful. I felt as if a stream o' cold water was runnin' down my back durin' the whole ceremony! If you find Mary Danton, I allow he'll do the job for you better nor any critter in the clearin's. He can shoot almost plum' centre, too; which qualifies him, in my 'pinion, more'n anything else for j'inin' folks together. Qualifications is everything. I've had trouble, Father Brady, since I see ye afore. My red sweetness has been taken away from me. May I never shoot plum' centre if she hasn't! It's now goin' on two year since she was swooped away by a rummagin', vagabond band of Injuns. And the little gal, too! Remember her, don't ye? Used to set on your knee, you know, and had a solemn little face, and eyes like black glass beads. I got mightily 'atched to her; I's fond of her a heap. Didn't her mother have a form, though? Did you ever see sich a face on a Nez Perce gal? They shot me, them optics did, plum' centre! Well, well, we're all human! It's no use to grieve, I s'pose, about by-gones, but nat'rally they come up. This lad, here, hasn't lost his wife, but he's lost his sweetheart; which 'mounts to the same thing. We're lookin' for her. You'd better jine us; and when everything is straightened out, we'll tramp to the mountains together. Wah!"

"There'll be time enough to think of that, my son. I own that it strikes me favorably. There isn't a man I'd rather have for a companion on such a long and perilous journey."

"Your riverence and I don't agree on that p'int. Sure and doesn't he wear moccasins and look like a haythen intirely. Faix, I'd rayther walk the woods with old Nick hisself!"

"Go 'long, you Connaught man!" said Kerly. "No more a Connaught man than yourself!"

There isn't a dhrop of Irish blood in me veins; I'm Frinch, intirely. Don't ye observe that I haven't a bit iv the brogue?" retorted Barney.

The mountaineer and Father Brady sat down by the fire and talked over old times, while Neil Travis wandered about restlessly. Just as the sun was rising, Barney Powers, who had busied himself in gathering fuel, made a fresh outcry.

"Arrah masha! what kind of a contrivance have we got here. I wonder. It looks, for all the worrold, like a long ladder sich as they use in carryin' bricks till the top o' buildin's, bedad! Bad 'cess to the man that made it, for Barney Powers 'll git his legs tangled in."

"It's a miner's ladder," said Travis, who happened to be near him.

"Is it the ladder iv one under age that ye mane? I can well belave it, upon me sowl; for no lad that's twenty-one would make sich a murtherin' murchine jist for the sake o' hidin' it in the bushes."

The circumstance of finding the ladder was quite suggestive to Kerly, and he and Travis began to examine the nearest mine; the same which had excited so much surprise in the mind of Barney. The mountaineer was not long in assuring himself that the shaft had been recently visited. There were marks at the edge of the pit, where the ladder had been pushed down and drawn up. Beside these signs, footprints could be distinguished and a small path had been worn in that place by frequent travel. Travis became excited at these discoveries. It seemed to him that they were about to solve the question concerning Mary Danton. What more natural than that her abductors should use the mine for present concealment?

He assisted to drag out the ladder and place it in the shaft, and was about to descend, when the mountaineer stopped him.

"Mayhap you'll find it dark down there," he said, "and pokin' round among pitfalls, when you can't tell the hind-sights from the fore-sights, wouldn't be by no means pleasant; you don't only run the risk of a tumble, but of havin' somebody pounce on ye onawares. Let's cut some pine torches, and do this job like reasonin' critters. Don't be narvous, Neil; nothin' may come o' this, arter all."

Some sticks of pitch pine were procured and lighted, and all but Barney went down. Travis persisted in going first. They all reached the bottom in safety, although the ladder trembled dangerously beneath the heavy weight of Father Brady. They stood still a moment, with their torches elevated, then cautiously proceeded to their explorations. They soon found the spot where the fire had been built. The evidences of recent human presence were indubitable.

"This mine," observed Father Brady, "was opened long ago. The walls and the arched roof bear the impress of age. It can only have been used for a hiding-place, it seems to me."

"No," replied Neil, "not for that purpose, only, for here are mining tools. Let us go farther into this passage. Look! here are fresh diggings!"

"What on airth could they be diggin' here for?" queried the mountaineer.

Father Brady took up a handful of earth.

"Copper, I dare say," he replied, carelessly. "They would look for neither gold nor diamonds here." He threw down the earth without discovering the glittering particles that it contained.

"I care not what they sought!" cried Travis, impatiently. "I seek a treasure more precious than silver, or gold, or diamonds."

"And a right small chance there seems of findin' it. Howsomever, arter you've got done runnin' this way and that, this old hoss will read signs a bit for ye."

"Signs!" echoed Travis. "This floor is as hard as a stone!"

The young man hurried from passage to passage; he made the entire circumference of the mine, and reached again the point from which they started. They had seen every visible space, but signally failed in their object. Neither the miners nor Mary Danton were found. Travis looked moody and despairing. His expectations had received a shock. He had hoped, cherished a secret conviction that this subterranean investigation would give him a clue to the fair subject of his anxiety.

"I'm ready to go," he said, despondingly.

"Not quite yet," replied the mountaineer. "While you's lookin' up, I looked down, and I see the print of a little foot in the ashes, close to where you see the brands. 'Twas a woman's foot; and what's more, 'twas hers!"

"Show it to me!" cried Travis.

"You wouldn't know it, lad. It was covered with a moccasin of deerskin, with the hair on. Made it myself. Step this way. There—that's the track."

Neil examined the impression.

"Cordin' to my notion, that proves one thing, which, is that she's been here. Well, what fol-lers? Why, that she's either here or been taken away. One of them things must be true. If she's here, she must be hidden up pooty close. If she's gone, we must foller. An't that reason-able? Can you talk any more to the p'int than that? If you can, speak. Wah!"

"That smacks of the mountains!" said Father Brady. "It does me good to hear you. You remind me of the times when I used to sit and listen to your long stories by the camp-fires of the fur-hunters. A man learns something even in the woods. We know what life is, my son. Many a juicy hump have we eaten together. Bless us, wasn't it delicious when roasted over a bright red flame, and eaten hungry?"

"Wah!"

"Then there was the excitement of danger; it added sweetness to our simple fare."

"Then there was the *habituals*, Father Brady, which is the nat'ral elements, and added another sweetness!" said Kid.

"Ah, thou heretic!" answered the priest, smacking his lips.

"To the devil with your camp-fires, stories, humps, and *habituals*!" interrupted Neil Travis, losing patience.

"The little track in the ashes won't spile; it won't, by no means," responded the imperturbable mountaineer. "There's no harm in talkin' a bit, lad, specially with an old friend. Your business is goin' on as fast as it cleverly can. Well, here's a sort of a cupboard! Here's shelves to put things on! Look, Travis, she stood here and took some at out. Shoot me plum' centre if she didn't! She trod in the ashes, you see, which stuck to the moccasins and left marks right where you see my finger."

"Notice the sagacity of this heretic," said Father Brady, admiringly.

"He sees what escapes other eyes," answered Travis, struck by the cool perspicacity of the mountaineer.

"They go this way," resumed the latter, as if talking to himself, "and here they end on the hard and stony floor."

Kid Kerly drew pipe and tobacco from his pouch, filled the bowl, lighted the weed, sat down, and puffed away with the immobility of a sleep-walker.

Neil Travis endured this as long as he could, then showed his disapprobation by fidgeting about and frowning.

"Well?" he muttered.

"Hush!" said the priest, in a whisper. "Don't interrupt him, for the world. He is deep—astonishingly deep! There never was another such heretic as Kid Kerly! Not a word!"

Travis made a strong endeavor to curb his restlessness. How could he repress his emotions while standing where Mary had so recently trodden? Numberless conjectures and startling possibilities whirled through his mind. Her despairing cries might have resounded through those subterranean windings. Perhaps she had called on him for help. Her shrieks, perchance, had been stifled by ruffian hands.

"If you can follow a trail, my friend, for my sake, let us go," he said, when he could no longer restrain his feelings.

Kid knocked the ashes from his pipe and carefully replaced it in the skin pouch. Neil began to ascend the ladder.

Kid walked father into the excavation, and raising his voice, shouted: "Mary Danton! Mary Danton!"

The young man paused in his ascent, hesitated, and then followed the mountaineer.

"Mary Danton!"

The name resounded from the walls as if it were a ball; echo tossed it to and fro.

"If you're hid anywhere, come out," added Kerly.

"A swallow's nest couldn't have escaped our search!" said the lover, mournfully. Kid moved along a narrow passage. The glare of the torches in the small space, made it seem in a blaze. The stentorian lungs of the mountaineer again sent forth the name—"Mary Danton!"

There was a slight, grating noise, a rustling of garments, and a female figure flitted from the wall of rock. In one hand she held a lamp; her long, black hair hung wildly over

her shoulders; it fluttered to her waist. Her face was pale and eager.

"Mary! Mary!" cried Neil Travis. He started forward to embrace her, but his strength failing, he fell, faint as a child, at her feet.

The girl uttered a joyous cry, stretched out her hands, and sank, swooning, in the arms of Father Brady, who bore her where the fresh air poured down the open shaft. Kerly raised Travis, and giving him a stout arm and shoulder for support, aided him to follow, which he did with a feeble and staggering step. The discovery proved nearly too much for his strength. Mary recovered before he was able to speak; but his face expressed the joy of his heart. He held her hand, nor attempted to hide the tears that rolled down his pallid cheeks.

Some time elapsed before Mary Danton was calm enough to give an account of what had happened since falling into the hands of the miners. Her auditors listened with interest, praising her courage and ingenuity. Neil's emotions were quite overpowering. The mountaineer whispered in his ear. A bright flush appeared on his cheeks. Kid and Father Brady retired a short distance, leaving the lovers free to converse. They talked earnestly. He soon drew from her the story of her wanderings in the woods, of which the trapper had given him but a meagre account.

"You have no protector, Mary?" said Travis, by-and-by.

"You will protect me, Neil."

"If you will give me the right, Mary."

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking down.

"Mary," whispered Neil, softly, "that man with the pleasant and happy-looking face is a priest."

"O my friend!" answered Mary, blushing.

"Providence has brought us together. Let us put it out of the power of man to put us asunder. If you consent, place your dear hand in mine, Mary."

Miss Danton sat and trembled a moment, then gave Neil her hand. Father Brady saw this movement, and approached them. There was a beaming smile on his benevolent countenance. He grasped the two united hands in his, and held them together.

"It is thus decreed, I think," he said. "Arise, my children!"

They stood up.

"So soon!" murmured Mary.

"Not a minute too soon!" said Kerly, stoutly.

Beneath the sullen, silent arches of the old copper-mine, on the shore of Lake Superior, Mary Danton and Neil Travis were wed.

"All we need, now," observed Father Brady, "is a wedding-dower. But I can do something for you, my children: I give you the whole world to be happy in!"

"Come this way," said Mary, with a smile, "and I will show you the dower. I am no portionless bride, as you shall see."

She conducted them to the gold-seeker's vault, where she had been concealed; they were full of curiosity. She opened the safe in the wall, and said, pointing to the gold:

"Behold the dower which Providence has sent me!"

She took a slip of paper from between the leaves of a book, and handed it to Father Brady, who read the following:

"Finding myself suddenly stricken and dying, I bequeath all my treasures to the person who shall be fortunate enough to find them. I have not a relative in the world."

"How often," said Father Brady, reverently, "is seeming evil over-ruled for good!"

"Mountains and trapsacks!" exclaimed Kid Kerly. "Here's luck, sure as shootin'! If things go on in this way, I shan't know hind-sights from fore-sights, by-and-by. Here's a white sweetness and a heap o' gold, all at one spring of the trap! Shoot me plum' centre, if it don't raise my sperrits and make me feel young ag'in!"

"My kind, honest friend," answered Mary, with brimming eyes, "it is in my power to reward your generous services. I will show you the spot where this ore was obtained; you, too, shall possess the gold-secret. And not only that, but one of these boxes is yours."

"My little gal, Kid Kerly has small use for gold. He'll pass the remainder of his life in a country where all the riches he needs grow spontaneous. Your white palm, full o' the glitterin' dust, will buy me all the powder and ball I shall want to carry to the mountains, and perhaps a new rifle, too. More'n that, bless your heart! I don't keer for. I wouldn't rob you, if

I wanted gold never so much. I'd go and dig for it, like a man. Wah! Now let's go up to the regions o' daylight."

"I'm a pretty bride," said Mary, looking at her tattered garments, and smiling through her tears.

"You're *that*, in right-down airnest!" affirmed Kerly, emphatically. "To be sure, your frock wants a little ketchin' up here an' there, but he must be blind who can't discern your nat'ral beauty shinin' from your face, and makin' you look sweet all over. You 'mind me' of Milly—you do. There never was such a red sweetness as Milly! Travis, my lad, put them boxes in my trapsack; I'm stronger, and better able to carry 'em nor you be. You forgot that in the basin; turn it right in; the sack's tight as a powder-horn. How that would make some folks' eyes glisten—Ralph Quimby's for instance! 'Twould buy a heap o' powder—wouldn't it? The poor critter that died here," added Kerly, presently, "oughter have decent burial, leastwise."

"He shall not be forgotten," said Mary, seriously.

The parties passed from the vault, carefully closing the little stone-door after them, and were soon above ground, with the bright and genial sun shining upon them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOMETHING OWEN CANNOT UNDERSTAND.

It was not without a painful internal struggle that Nattie of the lake-shore left Owen's island-palace to meet Whitelaw, agreeably to the appointment of the previous day. She thought she had evaded Tawny, but when she had gone a short distance, she looked back and saw her following. She accepted the silent monitor, and walked on. Whitelaw was awaiting her. His expression was more grave than usual. The line which Owen had drawn on the ground, was still visible; it had a moral for Nathalia; it spoke to her as with an audible voice. She did not cross it. Whitelaw, also, was affected with the same feeling. Both involuntarily stopped. Tawny glided between them; their greetings died on their lips. They strove to shake off the influence that came with the child.

"Nathalia," asked Whitelaw, "have you thought?"

"I have!" she murmured.

"Are you prepared to speak plainly? Shall this thing be? Shall we walk hand in hand through life together?"

"You ask," answered Nathalia, "what I cannot answer. It is *much* that you ask. Reflect on the shortness of our acquaintance; ponder the importance of this decision. What consequences hang on a word! I have been foolish; our intimacy has grown too fast. Modesty, prudence, forbid me to go further. Drive from your mind the thought of a nearer relation. Be content with calling me your daughter. I feel within me that what you wish, can never, never be."

"The disparity of ages is something, I know. That I deserve not such a treasure, I also feel. But would it not be better that you should have a legal protector in me? Reflect on your loneliness; call to mind the fearful guardianship of Ralph Quimby."

Whitelaw spoke with earnestness.

"All this has occurred to me. I have reflected till my head aches with the effort," she replied.

"I cannot, I dare not, press you! I have seen Ralph; he is willing, nay, he is anxious that a new relation should subsist between us."

"A sufficient reason," returned Nathalia, quickly, "that we should think no more of it. If he proposes it, it is time that we reject it. You know not the evil that is in him. O my friend, now I believe in the interdict of Owen! Did you ever now Ralph Quimby before? Have you any remembrance of his countenance?"

"Nothing clear and distinct. Sometimes I see a vague similitude to a face and person that I have somewhere met; but it is such a fragment of memory that I can make nothing of it. I confess that he often affects me unpleasantly."

"You recollect that you sat by me one night when I was ill—after I had that frightful fall. I watched his eyes when you did not see him; they seemed to me full of hatred."

"Strange!" murmured Whitelaw. "Your troubled mind may have given a wrong interpretation to his expression."

Nathalia was silent.

"Did you fall into the mine?" Whitelaw asked, suddenly.

Nathalia shuddered; her sweet face became pale. She made a pushing motion with her hands.

"He pushed you in!" he said, with a searching look. "How long did you remain in the water?"

"Several miserable hours!" she answered, in a very low voice. "I was chilled, and the fear of death was on me."

"He returned and saved you?"

"He did."

"How did he appear?"

"Excited and eager."

"Infamous villain!" muttered Whitelaw. "Do you know any possible motive for this unnatural deed?"

"I have a secret, which he considers of importance. I know where he obtains gold. I saw him, too, attempt the lives of Neil Travis and Bernard Ross, actuated by a firm conviction that those two young men were watching him for the purpose of discovering the gold-secret. Ralph wished to lay me under a solemn obligation to observe perpetual silence in regard to my knowledge, which my whole soul, at that time, rebelled against, and I refused."

"That may account for pushing you into the mine, but not for taking you out. The whole transaction fills me with horror and amazement. But it is too dreadful to talk of, and furnishes the strongest possible reason why you should be withdrawn entirely from his influence, and placed completely beyond his reach. Give to me, Nathalia, the sweet privilege of guarding you. Every consideration urges this plea. That wonderful sympathy which draws us together, asks and demands it. Nathalia, let us break down this superstitious barrier; find rest and shelter in these arms."

Nathalia was moved. She had confidence in him who stood before her; a firm, yet gentle trust in his manhood. Her eyes wandered from his eloquent face to Tawny. She thought of the warning of Owen; she could not forget Bernard. Her distress was apparent to Whitelaw; he grieved to give her so much pain. Two powerful, invisible forces were upon the twain; the one pushed them forward, the other held them back.

Tawny, fixed and motionless, looked straight forward, seemingly seeing and hearing nothing. The little red hands, crossed upon her back, were toward Nattie; their childish smallness appealing to what was affectionate and motherly within her.

"Shall I put her aside, Nattie?" asked Whitelaw.

There was a deeper meaning in his voice than naturally attached to the simple action referred to. Nathalia understood him.

"No, no!" she answered, earnestly. "Let her remain between us. Let her remain, I say! Let us not scorn the voice that speaks to us. Owen is my friend; my guardian; and without his consent I will do nothing."

"You have spoken right, Queen Nattie," said Owen himself, suddenly appearing. "You must always think of me. It was I that took you away from the wicked one, and it is I who take care of you. He has come to my island, but he'll have to go off; I sha'n't let him stay. He that runs beside me, whispers about him."

"We wish not to be disturbed," said Whitelaw, somewhat annoyed.

"Never you be afraid! All you've to do, is to listen to the wild boy of the woods. You haven't passed the line, I see; Tawny's feet are on it. Ah, ha! But she'll haunt you! I've only to tell her to do a thing, and she does it. If you's to stay here all day, she wouldn't be tired. Tawny is the line; you can't pass over Tawny. Come, Nattie, come away! Bernard is at the lodge, looking cross. You must speak a good word to Bernard; there's no little Ingin girl between you and Bernard."

Then to Whitelaw:

"Melancholy one, you can come, too. There'll be no harm in goin' there. You've only to be careful of what you say to Bernard. You mustn't talk any more with Ralph. Ralph hates you; he that runs by my side says he hates you. He wants you to drag Nattie down, down! There's a secret somewhere, a very strange secret, which will come out one of these days."

"What is it, Owen?" asked Nathalia, impressed by the youth's manner and words.

"Ah, ha! that's what I can't understand. The whisperer has tried to make me, but I can't. I wonder there is anything I can't understand. It'll come to me some time, perhaps."

"There is something inexplicable in all this," mused Whitelaw. "If it be madness, it is an extraordinary madness."

"At times," answered Nathalia, "this boy's utterances seem like inspiration."

Owen's handsome face was turned earnestly

upon Nattie; his eyes gleamed with pleasure. He had found a soul that, in some degree, comprehended him. Her words fell most gratefully on his ears.

"I will not agree with you on that point," said Whitelaw. "It is our duty to be governed by our best judgment, God having given us reason for our guidance. Owen has told you truly that Ralph is on the island; Nat Stratton is with him. But do not fear. You have friends who will watch over you. Go with the lad, Nathalia. I will see you again at the lodge. Heaven keep you till then!"

Whitelaw left her slowly, and she returned with Owen to his island home.

CHAPTER XXVII.

STRATTON REBELS.

Whitelaw and Ralph Quimby again stood face to face. They met beneath the spreading trees on the east side of the island.

"You have seen my niece," said Ralph. "What have you to say to me?"

"But little, indeed. I doubt your right to treat with me on this subject. Your motives are, to me, mysterious," returned the other.

"What motive can I have but the good of the child? I feel myself unfitted to care for so gentle a creature. My temper is unequal—my moods dark and changeable. I have not always done right by Nattie. In you, I think I have found a man of honor, who will make her happiness your chiefest care. This is why I assent so willingly. Is not the matter clear enough?"

Ralph appeared thoughtful and candid.

"You are a man of evil deeds, I am afraid. Your hands are by no means free from guilt. I have heard dark whispers concerning the disappearance of Bernard Ross. The lad Owen, in a recent visit to the shore, has seen Kid Kerly, who, in searching for the young man, detected certain suspicious marks in the sand. He distinctly traced the imprint of feet, and found a small red spot near the water's edge. He had no difficulty in recognizing the tracks, a long life in the Northwest having rendered him very critical and acute in such matters. The trunk of a pine tree had been rolled from the shore into the lake. A foul murder, it would seem, has been committed."

Whitelaw did not take his eyes from Ralph's countenance. He observed the rapid changes in his expression.

"Do you accuse me of the crime?" asked Ralph, frowning, and assuming an offended air. "Did you come here to insult me, or to speak of Nathalia? If the first be your motive, let us part; I will take away my niece, and you will see her no more."

"I have, as yet, accused you of nothing. I have but uttered the thoughts that naturally come up in my mind upon seeing you, and remembering what Owen heard from the mountaineer."

Whitelaw spoke calmly.

"The boy Owen is an idiot, and Kid Kerly a meddling fool! The trapper had better go back to his fur-hunting, scalps, and squaws. Come not to me, Mr. Whitelaw, with words like those you have uttered. I know that I have my seasons of madness; but I was never mad enough to take human life. There is a hereditary taint of insanity in the Quimby family. This I am free to acknowledge; but it runs not to the commission of crime. If it has ever led me to evil, repentance followed so close upon it that I mastered to repair the wrong."

Ralph's manner was self-deprecating and humble. Had Whitelaw known less of him, his words would have had more weight.

"I feel it my duty," added the miner, "to warn you concerning the boy Owen, whose folly sometimes takes a dangerous direction. In his anger, he is terribly violent! I know not that he had anything against young Ross; but he might have had. I don't accuse him of the murder, if there has been one; but I am sure that a paroxysm of rage would carry him to perilous extremities."

"I have never observed anything but gentleness in the character of the youth. He is strangely averse to having Nattie accept the offer I have made her. On that subject he is singularly in earnest."

"Her beauty has, doubtless, affected the half-witted creature. Persons less foolish than he have loved her. And now you furnish a motive to make him dislike the young man, Ross."

"You think Owen loves Nathalia?" interrogated Whitelaw.

"After what you have told me, I don't enter-

tain a doubt of it. Beware of him—beware of him! Although a mere lad, he may work you infinite mischief," said Quimby, with a warning shake of the head.

"You deceive neither yourself nor me. I never shall fear Owen: he is innocent of himself."

"A fatal mistake, this opinion may prove!" exclaimed Ralph, uneasily; for the self-possession of Whitelaw annoyed him. His hatred burned fiercely within; but he stifled the flame which had blackened and charred his conscience. A sense of insecurity haunted him. Every support seemed slipping from beneath him. His crime on the lake shore was following him. Suspicion was already pointing at him. Possibly, he would be obliged to flee before his villainy was accomplished. While his thoughts and fears were thus active, Nat Stratton joined them. Anger and discontent were pictured upon his visage. He scowled at Ralph, as he drew near.

"Mind what you do!" he muttered. "Mind, I tell ye! No double-dealin' with me."

"His mind is somewhat shattered," whispered Ralph to Whitelaw.

"Shattered!" repeated Stratton, catching the last word. "Who wouldn't be shattered, to suffer what I have? Come, come! If I can't hit the mark, no one shall." Then, to Whitelaw: "Whatever he wants you to do, don't do it! You can't trust him; if he says one thing, he means another. If he says he's your friend, set it down that he's your deadly enemy. There's the truth for ye, Ralph! Ha! ha! How do you like the truth? You don't hear it often. But you'll hear it now, every day and hour."

"My poor friend," answered Ralph, soothingly, and with transcendent hypocrisy, "be calm! It's all right; nothing is wrong. You shall have your own way in everything."

"What does he want?" inquired Whitelaw, with a penetrating glance.

"What he has promised!" cried Stratton.

"That you shall have," interposed Quimby, quickly. "It's all right, I say."

"It's all wrong, I say!" thundered Stratton. "Why do you lead me on and on? Why do you point the way to perdition? Why do you heap crime on me? Are my miseries to go for nothing? Have I enriched you, to be mocked at in return? I will rob you of that. I will tell all the world where treasure can be had for the diggin'!"

"For God's sake, comrade, be quiet!" cried Ralph, internally boiling with rage, but keeping down its outward manifestation.

"You wince, do ye? I touch the raw spot, don't I? But am I to be a football for you durin' the rest o' my life? My time is short; them terrible sights will cover me, soon. I shall be shot plum' centre. What do I care what happens? Don't frown and glare at me, Ralph Quimby; you can't change one hair white nor black. I am so near played out, that I am indifferent to everything. I can't be hanged, nor drowned, nor stabbed with steel! I have a sublime advantage over ye all. Quail before me, you Ralph Quimby! I shouldn't wonder if I should throttle ye, so you can go before, and tell 'em I'm comin'!"

Ralph took him by the arm, to lead him away; for he trembled at the consciousness of the revelations it was in his power to make. Stratton shook him off in a moment.

"No, no!" he said. "We two are done. You have broken faith with me; you are bargainin' with him for Nattie. Don't deny it, for I overheard ye. I crept along like a serpent on the ground. I mistrusted mischief. How sharp my ears were! I could hear you think, almost. I know the truth, now. You can go your way, Ralph, and I'll go mine; and we'll see how 'twill end. Whitelaw, look out for this man. He has no love for ye, and, by some infernal, crooked, windin' subtlety, he'll catch you in his black spider's web. He promised me Nathalia before he did you. I loved her, stranger! You know nothin' about love, or you wouldn't stand there, so calm and quiet. Men go mad who love as I do. My passion has burned away my senses; it has consumed my life. I shall die a miserable wretch, obnoxious alike to her and to God. This monster has fed my hopes; he has led me from step to step, till I am spotted as a leper, with sin. If you would be happy, spurn this creature. You'll outlive me; and, if you have any power over the girl, take her to some country so distant that he never heard its name!"

Stratton waved his hand solemnly, warningly, and darted away. Whitelaw turned his footsteps toward Owen's lodge, leaving Ralph standing motionless and astounded.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"TRAPS AND TRAPSACKS!"

It was not without a secret feeling of uneasiness and distrust that Bernard Ross saw Whitelaw appear at the lodge. He received him coldly.

"I will not flatter myself," he said, "that I am the particular object of this visit."

Nathalia affected not to hear this remark. She beheld this meeting with apprehension; her feminine delicacy made her shrink from its consequences. She felt keenly the embarrassment of her situation. Without intention, she had been gradually hemmed in by a singular network of circumstances. Here were two persons laying claim to her favor, and she so swayed and tossed about by conflicting emotions that she found it a painful and difficult thing to decide between them. That she loved Bernard, she felt certain; while Whitelaw inspired her with the deepest confidence and regard. If she loved one, she had faith in the other. She sincerely wished that both would leave her, and spare her blushes and confusion.

"I have heard," replied Whitelaw, "partly from Nathalia and partly from Owen, of the attempt recently made upon your life by the two miners. Your escape was as remarkable as the design was criminal. I heartily congratulate you that the affair terminated so well. What most annoys me, in connection with this, is, that one of the parties bears relationship to one who is dear to both of us."

The frankness and candor with which Whitelaw spoke, disarmed Bernard of a portion of his resentment.

"For her sake," he replied, "I have said little of the matter. Indeed, I have been nearly silent in regard to the perpetrators of the dastardly act."

"Twas considerate and delicate. You perceive that Nathalia is thrown upon our protection and kindness. Ralph Quimby is not for her a fitting guardian. You, perhaps, already know that he is dangerous, even to her. She must never, never be again in his power. Believe me, what I say is prompted by feelings of the purest friendship for Nathalia. I seek but the happiness of this sweet child. I only ask to be near her—to see her—to minister to her enjoyment; and this will content me. Bernard Ross, I am not your enemy. You have misunderstood me, but I have comprehended you. Let us be friends—at least, for the present. It were cruel in you and in me to embarrass and pain Nattie while situated as she now is."

"You should have thought of this before, Mr. Whitelaw," replied Bernard, considerably softened.

"The rebuke is not unmerited, and I will be careful that I do not again deserve it. Are we friends, young man?"

"So far as men placed as we are may be," answered Bernard, with effort.

"Mr. Whitelaw, I thank you that you have spoken thus. You have said the right words at the right time. What pleasure it will give me to see you friends! You will remove a mountain of misery from my heart! It seems to me that the sun shines brighter for your goodness!" said Nathalia, with earnest enthusiasm.

Bernard had not yet conquered himself; pride, jealousy, and lingering distrust of the man still perplexed him. He tried manfully, however, to be magnanimous.

"Your confidence is not perfect; but time, I believe, will give it strength."

"Do not doubt him, Bernard! I am sure he is all truth," added Nathalia, looking entreatingly at the younger man.

The latter lifted his eyes to look at her, and saw the little girl, Tawny, standing between her and Whitelaw. There was something about the circumstance that looked like premeditation.

"It's the flaming sword," muttered Whitelaw, "guarding an Eden of innocence!"

"What did you say?" asked Bernard.

"I was thinking aloud," he answered. "Part of my object in coming here was to say what I have said; my visit has yet another purpose, which is, the punishment of those who attempted your life. I do not refer to the law and its penalties, but purpose making a direct appeal to their consciences by a simple artifice. In brief, I have a plan to act upon their fears in such a startling manner as to lead them to the confession of their guilt."

"No one will unite with you more heartily than I," replied Bernard, "in bringing about such a result."

"They have every reason to believe," resumed the other, "that you are not among the liv-

ing. It would probably be exceedingly hard to create a doubt in their minds concerning your fate. My plan is, to bring them both here, by some pretext—to see Nathalia, perhaps—when I will gradually and naturally lead the conversation to occult matters. I will operate on their imaginations; I will skillfully play on their guilty minds. I will make the boldest claims, and back them up with such a show of philosophy that their curiosity will be aroused. Sophistry shall go for argument, and a solemn manner for the self-consciousness of a great truth. Your supposed death I will adroitly refer to; and finally put the climax to my pretensions by impressively asserting my ability to call up the ghost of the murdered man, to fix the awful crime upon the perpetrators."

"I comprehend. I enter entirely into your purpose. All shall be prepared to favor the pardonable deception; and when you evoke me, I will appear. Arrange it as you will."

This matter being settled, Bernard began to feel more at ease. He was glad that this new footing was established between Whitelaw and himself. Nathalia was evidently happier for this adjustment. Whitelaw remained a long time at the lodge. He was going, when he was surprised by seeing the good-natured face of Kid Kerly at the door. He was accompanied by Owen, who had been absent since Nathalia's interview with Whitelaw early in the morning.

"Traps and trapsacks!" exclaimed the mountaineer. "This is some'at like the Nor-west—this is. Nice lodge! nice lodge! Well, this beats the airth and all natur' put together! Here's squirrels, and beavers, and cookin'-tools, and Nattie of the Woods. Hillo! here's a little Injun gal, as sure as shootin'! This is a palace, by guns!"

Kid paused, and braced himself against his rifle, looking hard at Tawny.

"That is my little Ingin girl," said Owen.

"Wah!"

Tawny looked up quickly at this sound.

"The beaver cuts my wood," added Owen, "the squirrels do my singin', and Tawny runs here and there, as I tell her. Tawny has to work; I don't have no lazy ones here."

"Wah!" responded Kerly, his eyes still fixed on the girl.

"She's handy to have in my palace," continued the youth. "She looks pretty, layin' on the otter skin at Queen Nattie's feet. I sometimes put her in my canoe for a figure-head, and she does wonderfully well, for she sits just as I tell her."

"It is!" said the mountaineer.

"Don't stare in that way, Tawny!" admonished Owen; for the child's bronzed face was turned up to the trapper's with singular earnestness.

"No, it isn't!" muttered Kid. "Yes, 'tis! Shoot me plum' centre, if 'tisn't! Milly—Milly!"

Tawny took a hesitating step toward Kerly.

"Milly!" he repeated, softly.

The lights and shades of awakened remembrances swept over the child's face. She held out her hands. Kid Kerly threw his rifle from him, and caught her in his arms.

Nathalia and the others beheld this scene with astonishment.

"Ah, ha!" said Owen. "Never you fear, any or ye! Never you fear while Owen and his whisperer are about. He that runs by my side is deep. Ah, ha! What do you think of this, Queen Nattie? Owen's devil has found a father for Tawny!"

Kid Kerly held Tawny at arm's length, looking steadily at her for the space of a minute.

"If 'tisn't her," he muttered, "I don't know hind-sights from fore-sights!"

He then hugged the little creature to his breast, set her upon her feet, and with a long breath exclaimed:

"Wah!"

Tawny did not speak nor cry out, but looked up at the mountaineer with inexpressible earnestness. Thus between the two was the bond acknowledged.

"Two year ago," said Kid, explanatorily, "my wife and child was stole from me. This here little critter is the child. How she got down here, I don't know; but it's her, sure as shootin'!"

"Found her a long way off," said Owen. "Almost starved, Tawny was. But I took care of her. We know how to take care of little Ingin girls—the whisperer and I. But she's had to work, though, to pay for it! Ah, ha! I've been a hard master to Tawny!"

Tawny looked lovingly at Owen, and smiled.

"I see you have!" said Kerly, in a voice that

was a trifle husky. "Shall have hard work to git her away from ye, in my opinion. But you're a good lad—a good lad! I'm your friend for life, that's sarfin. If you can't get any better father, come to me, boy, come to me. It will go hard with the critter that harms ye—shoot me plum' centre if it won't!"

Owen was sitting on the steps of Nattie's throne. Tawny went and crouched at his feet.

"You can't part us," said Owen. "You can't part us, never—never—never!"

Kid Kerly brushed away a tear with the sleeve of his hunting-shirt, and muttered:

"I won't do it! I won't do it!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CONJURATION.

Ralph Quimby was much chagrined and confounded by his interview with Whitelaw. The inopportune interference of Stratton, too, affected him not a little, and he immediately resolved upon a new plan of action. As soon as he had recovered his self-possession, he hurried after his confederate, who was now becoming dangerous in more ways than one. To conciliate, and regain his ascendancy, he now considered paramount. He had a hard struggle to overtake him, and no less a task to secure his attention. He soothed him by every art in his power; he contrived to fix his mind on Nathalia, and solemnly renewed all his promises.

"Nattie," he said, at length, "is on this island; and, to show you that I am in earnest, I will help you to take her away. We will lay our plans with skill and secrecy. We will baffl—Whitelaw and Owen."

"It is hard to cheat Owen," replied Stratton, doubtfully.

"No doubt he goes to the main land, occasionally, and Whitelaw, I am very sure, lives in a cave; though I've never been able to find it. The girl is secreted somewhere on the west side of this island. Nothing will be easier than to discover her hiding-place. We will seize her, put her on our raft, and land on the shore of the Ten Mile Trace. What is more feasible than this? Its accomplishment is certain."

"If we do it, you'll deceive me again!" grumbled Stratton.

"I will not! She shall be placed in your power. I will do nothing to thwart you."

With arguments and protestations of this kind, he succeeded once more in enlisting Nat Stratton in his service. The miners, thus partially reconciled, began a strict search for Nathalia. They had reached the western side of the island, and had spent some hours in the pursuit, when they unexpectedly encountered Whitelaw.

"You are looking for Nathalia," he said. "Come to this spot, after sunset, and I will conduct you to her."

The eyes of Stratton flashed with wild pleasure; but Ralph, more subtle, tried to find Whitelaw's motive.

"You will take me to Nathalia?" he repeated.

"Unquestionably! I have much to say to you. It is for your interest and mine that we discuss matters freely and confidentially. Let your friend come with you; he shall hear everything. But you must make no attempt to take Nathalia from her present retreat, nor use your knowledge of it, afterward, to her detriment."

"I don't wish to harm my niece," replied Ralph, gruffly. "We will be here at the time; and if this proposal be made in anything but good faith, remember that we shall go armed, and that men rendered desperate by treachery, fight long and die hard."

"Fear not," said Whitelaw. "You and your friend should be a match for Owen and I. Remember the time."

He passed on, leaving the miners both elated and mystified. They discussed the incident a long time, finally concluding to be governed in their conduct, after being guided to Nathalia, as circumstances might seem to warrant. With this understanding, they busied themselves the remainder of the day in repairing their raft, and making it available for instant use. Satisfied with their labors, they met Whitelaw, as agreed upon, and followed him with curiosity, not mingled with anxiety, to Owen's lodge.

Nathalia was seated upon her rural throne; Tawny was reclining at her feet, while Owen was stretched, dreamily, upon some wolf-skins at her right. The squirrels had retired to their nests, but the beaver crouched in a corner.

It was quite dark when Ralph entered. Several pine torches, thrust in the ground in a circle, near the centre of the area, illuminated the lodge. Both the miners were manifestly sur-

prised at what they beheld; they had not anticipated a scene so unique and striking. Ralph nodded his head slightly to Nathalia, who did not raise her eyes to look at him, then said to Whitelaw, carelessly:

"Well, this is comfortable, I'm sure! The housekeeping arrangements seem to be quite complete. A pretty good place for my runaway niece!"

Whitelaw pointed to seats. Ralph sat down; but Stratton stood a moment, gazing at Nathalia.

"Down!" whispered Ralph. Stratton mechanically obeyed, respiring heavily. Quimby turned to Whitelaw, glanced at Nathalia and Owen, and asked:

"What have you to say, Mr. Whitelaw?"

"I would ask you," answered the other, "to relinquish all claims to this young woman, and to assume no right nor authority to govern her actions. Indeed, she has arrived at an age when she needs not the censorship of such an uncle."

"A modest request, truly!" sneered Ralph. "Being her only relative and guardian, it is my duty to maintain that censorship of which you are desirous to deprive me. My niece must come and go when I bid her. Officious meddling with my affairs will prove unprofitable to you or any one."

Ralph spoke with manifest bitterness. He found it hard to struggle with that burning hatred that was within him—that had haunted—that had followed him year after year. The failure of his project, and a change of tactics, produced a change of manner. Policy did not now seem to dictate that deceptive smoothness which had before characterized his intercourse with Whitelaw. A moiety of his vindictiveness oozed out, in spite of his great self-control.

"You mean to say that you will not allow Nathalia to choose her own tenor of life, and such companionship as is congenial to her age and tastes; and, I might add, which is proper to her sex?"

Whitelaw's stern and melancholy eyes were bent upon Ralph, who quailed before them.

"I mean to say he answered, doggedly, that all my friendly overtures being rejected by you, I can hold no farther parley with you respecting my niece. I have, at present, other views."

"May I ask what they are?"

"You can."

"I do!"

"And I will not tell you! I deny your right to come between me and mine. Your treatment, your coldness, your sinister insinuations, have changed my feelings toward you. If I do not put you to the trouble of proving your accusations, attribute it to my forbearance."

"Nathalia," exclaimed Stratton, springing to his feet, "is mine! I have loved her with an intense and fatal love."

Ralph caught him by the arm and drew him back to his seat.

Nattie shuddered.

"Be quiet, stupid animal!" admonished Ralph. "Leave all to me."

"I will ask no forbearance, Ralph Quimby," said Whitelaw. "I can, if need be, bring startling evidence of guilt; but I must have time."

"Now—now!" retorted Ralph. "I demand those proofs now. He who accuses me of murder, shall not put me off by ingenious pretexts. I throw upon you the responsibility of those proofs. I will not be rendered terrible and criminal in the eyes of my niece."

He darted a warning look at Nathalia.

"Ah, ha!" interposed Owen. "Owen's devil can bring evidence. He that runs beside me knows how murder comes out."

"Peace, fool!" said Ralph, turning sharply upon him.

"I would," added Whitelaw, with a pensive air, "that you had spared me this trial. I possess, Ralph Quimby, unhappily for me, a strange and terrible gift. I can recall from that bodiless world whence they go, the restless ghosts of murdered persons, for the purpose of fixing upon their slayers the crime of their deaths."

Ralph laughed derisively; Stratton regarded the speaker with mute attention.

"Laugh, if you will," resumed Whitelaw, impressively, "but more serious emotions will, perhaps, arise, when I assure you that I am willing to be put to the test, and will, at your bidding, evoke the spirit of the murdered Bernard Ross."

"Frightful!" exclaimed Nathalia.

"The device will do for children; it is too shallow for full-grown men," said Ralph, in-

credulously, and with a motion of contempt with the hand.

"Do you put me to the proof?" demanded Whitelaw, with solemnity.

"I do! I do! Proceed with your incantations; I am ready! Ralph Quimby can't be frightened with hobgoblins."

"We'd better go," whispered Stratton, touching Ralph upon the arm.

"Don't be an idiot! When we leave this lodge, Nathalia goes with us!" He struck upon his breast-pocket, where he carried his revolver, and let the breech of his rifle fall warningly upon the ground.

"Ah, now you talk sense, Ralph! We will carry her away, if we have to cut this man in pieces!"

Stratton grasped his knife. There was a ferocious glare in his eyes.

"Never you be afraid, Nattie. The whisperer has whispered a good word in my ear. Ah, ha! We're enough for the wicked ones. Sit you there, Queen Nattie, and be calm," said Owen, encouragingly.

"Go on with your farce!" said Quimby, impatiently.

"Be silent, then. Utter not a word while I proceed. Your safety will depend on your strict observance of this precaution. It is no light thing I am about to do."

Ralph shrugged his shoulders; but Stratton's countenance was grave and anxious. It was the former's threat only, in regard to Nathalia, that gave him courage. In imagination, he had already seen the ghost of Bernard a score of times. He would have fled, had not the young woman held him like a magnet.

The torches flared and flickered in the centre of the lodge. A black smoke arose from the burning pitch, mounting fantastically to the opening above. Sometimes the flames burned with an intense fervor, casting a red glare on every object, then fitfully subsiding, left a pale glimmer, in striking and ghastly contrast.

Whitelaw arose and walked slowly around the torches three times, repeating some monotonous words in a language unfamiliar to Ralph. He then plucked some hairs from his beard and head, threw them into the flames, and again muttered the unintelligible formula. This done, he dropped something upon the torches that emitted a pungent odor, and speedily diffused itself through every part of the lodge.

All this was done with the greatest gravity. The conjurer now seemed agitated, darted a warning glance at the miners, clasped his hands, bowed his head reverently, and said, in a loud and solemn voice:

"Bernard Ross! Bernard Ross! Appear—appear!"

Whitelaw paused. The objurgation acted upon Stratton's guilty conscience. Dread was upon his face; while something more than curiosity mounted to the eyes of Ralph. No spectre uprose.

"Wherever thou dwellest," resumed Whitelaw, in the same thrilling tones, "whether in the earth beneath or the air above, separate thyself from the elements, and take visible form. Appear! appear!"

A cloud of smoke suddenly rolled up between the torches and the extremity of the lodge; when it disappeared, Bernard Ross was seen standing there. His garments were saturated with water; a cord dangled from one of his wrists, his face was deadly pale, and there was a little spot of blood on his forehead. His eyes were open and fixed.

Both Ralph and Stratton arose with an involuntary cry, and gazed at this unexpected apparition with unspeakable consternation.

"Spirit," said Whitelaw, in a subdued tone, "to subserve the decrees of eternal justice, indicate thy murderers."

Bernard slowly raised his arm and pointed grimly at the miners. Stratton fell upon his knees, exclaiming:

"I confess! I confess! Yes, we are guilty—Ralph and I. But he led me on; he whispered the murderous thought."

Ralph sank to his seat, and covered his face with his hands. His strong frame shook like a reed. His hardihood was for a moment conquered.

"You confess?" said Whitelaw, turning to Stratton.

"All—all! Bid him go—bid him go!" he answered, averting his gaze from the, to him, terrific vision.

"This is hallucination!" muttered Ralph.

"Look up," added Whitelaw.

Both obeyed; but Bernard Ross had disappeared.

Ralph Quimby's natural effrontery began to return.

"What means this miserable jugglery?" he stammered.

"It's meaning, to you, must be fearful," Whitelaw answered, with severity.

"You may frighten this poor maniac," resumed Ralph, making a contemptuous motion toward Stratton, who stood trembling, his features convulsed with terror, "but a man in his senses will scorn such trickery."

"I wished to convince myself of the accusing fears of a guilty mind, and induce you to acknowledge a crime. I have deceived you in but one thing. You have seen, not a disembodied and ghostly existence, but Bernard Ross in his proper and corporal form. Your cowardly attempt upon his life providentially failed. He was borne on the waves toward this island, and saved by the extraordinary daring and skill of Owen."

"Not dead! not dead!" cried Stratton, exultingly. "Ha ha! that gives me strength again I come back to life!"

He paused and looked at Nathalia. His wild and ungovernable passion was rekindled in all its fierce fervor.

"He's alive—is he? Then he will come and take her. Yes, I shall lose her. That will be worse than death! I had rather die than live to see such a thing. Die? Shall I not die soon? I shall—I shall! The hour draws near. She shall go before, and I will follow, to love her in that world!"

Stratton sprang toward Ralph, snatched the pistol from his pocket, cocked and leveled it at Nathalia, with that incredible quickness that characterizes the movements of madmen. A puff of smoke came from the opposite side of the lodge; the crack of a rifle rent the air; Stratton clapped his hand upon his breast, sprang upward, and fell. In falling, his fingers clutched the pistol convulsively; it was discharged, and its contents lodged in Ralph's right side.

Kid Kerly immediately stepped from his hiding-place and stood beside Nattie, a little jet of smoke still curling from the muzzle of his weapon.

"Plum' centre!" groaned Stratton. "I told ye I should be shot plum' centre! I'm goin'—goin'! You'll soon follow, Ralph. Heaven directed my fallin' hand. Nattie—where are ye, Nattie? Your face grows dim. I hear the dash of waves. Bernard! Bernard! How the dark vapors settle on the lake! How fast I drift! I shall not drown. Plum' centre—plum' centre, I tell ye, Ralph!"

Nat Stratton uttered the concluding words in a husky whisper, and drifted away forever on the Lake of Death.

CHAPTER XXX.

AND THE LAST.

While the final act in the scene of the miner's life was transpiring, other forms glided silently into the lodge—Neil Travis, his young wife, Father Brady, and Barney Powers, who had all been ferried over to the island by Owen, and had remained hidden outside, watching Whitelaw's conjuration through small openings in the lodge. Not one of them had anticipated such a tragedy.

Ralph Quimby had fallen from his seat upon the floor, where he was writhing in pain, bleeding very fast.

Prompted by feelings of humanity, Whitelaw attempted to examine his wound, but Ralph shrank from his touch, exclaiming:

"Away! away! I want not your aid. This wound is past the art of man; and if it were not, you, of all men, should not minister to me."

"Tisn't a time for them kind o' feelin's," said Kid Kerley. "All dislikes ought to be forgot when one's life is flowin' from him, as yours is. Confession, they say, is good for the soul. I don't pretend to be much in the way o' goodness, but I mean to do about right, sure as shootin'. It's true that I shot that copper-diggin' ritter plum-centre; but it was the only way o' savin' the gal. He'd better go under nor she; and I can't say that I'm sorry I put an end to his wickedness. He wasn't of much 'count, no ways; but Nathalia is a blessin' to all that come near her. Her life is worth more nor a score o' sich villains, and I don't think the Master o' Life will greatly reprove me for the deed."

Tawny stole to her father's side, and nestled her hand in his.

"Poor little one! I wouldn't had ye seen

such a sight, but it couldn't be helped. It was her or him, Milly, and it better be him by all odds."

Nathalia now came forward to perform kindly offices for the wounded man.

"Don't touch me! don't touch me!" he exclaimed. "Your fingers will burn me like fire."

"Look at me, Uncle Ralph! It is Nathalia who speaks to you," she added, earnestly.

"No, no! your face is too like your mother's," he answered, with mournful bitterness.

"You have sometimes told me that I was quite unlike her, except in form, having my father's features," she replied.

"Other eyes might not see the similitude, but mine can, girl," returned Ralph, clutching the ground, spasmodically, in his agony.

"Raise him," said Whitelaw, "and lay him on the skins."

Bernard approached to assist Kerly in the performance of this office. Ralph did not perceive him until the friendly act was accomplished.

"You have come, too, to accuse me!" he groaned. "I must look all the evil of my life in the face, must I, in these last tortured moments of existence? Maledictions on the maniac who gave me this wound!"

"My son," said Father Brady, "this is not a time to indulge in bitterness and recrimination. Your sands of life are fast ebbing. In a little while you will be beyond the reach of human sympathy and aid. You have a wounded soul, which God only can heal. Look at this blessed symbol of redemption, and confess your sins before it be too late."

Father Brady held a cross before the wandering eyes of Ralph.

"Take it away! I have scorned it too long!"

A fiercer pang wrung from him a cry of suffering.

"The mercy of God is a white-robed angel that never flies from the repentant soul, but persuades it to confession with soft and loving tears," continued Father Brady.

"My life," retorted Ralph, almost fiercely, "has been one of hatred and vindictiveness!"

"Pour your heavy burden into my ear, my son, and I will do all that a humble servant of God may for the dying."

Whitelaw watched the distorted features of the man with melancholy interest. Again those fragments of memory that had on several occasions visited him, floated dimly through the chambers of his mind.

"Edward—Edward! stand away!" gasped Ralph, glancing at Whitelaw in terror.

"What do I hear? Who calls me Edward?" cried the latter.

"Don't glare at me in that way! I loved her before you! But you won her—you had a more persuasive tongue."

Ralph lifted himself partially from the skins, trembling violently.

"William! William!" articulated Whitelaw, with difficulty. "Is it indeed your voice that I hear—a voice that I believed death had silenced long ago?"

"So you know me at last, Edward Graham!" retorted Ralph, with a sardonic laugh. "Can you see anything that looks like your brother William in this hate-stricken face? Have years left any vestiges of the once innocent boy? Ay, look at me! It is *me*—I did not die as was reported; I lived to dash the cup of bliss from your lips. I whispered in her ears, while you were absent, the falsehoods that broke her heart. I gave her such damning proof of your perfidy, that she believed, and died. My vengeance was not complete till I had artfully blackened her memory in your mind, so that you had no heart to look upon her grave. It was my agency that did all this."

"Unhappy man!" groaned Whitelaw.

"There is more to relate; you had a daughter, of whom, after her mother's death, you lost all trace. This hand took her from you! I envied you anything that would remind you of your lost love. She might sometime, too, minister to that passion for revenge that had grown to overmaster every other desire. After I saw and recognized you, I formed a purpose, which would have filled to the brim the cup of my vengeance and your despair."

Whitelaw was now bending toward the dying man with an intensity that was painful to see. Every word from Ralph's lips stirred the deepest emotions of his soul.

"The last blow would have crushed you!" hissed Ralph. "Nathalia is your daughter! Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

Nathalia grew deadly pale, and fainted. Bernard caught her as she was falling.

Amazement, joy, and horror, were alternately pictured upon Whitelaw's face. He staggered under the intelligence, as if it were too astounding, too monstrous, to believe.

"Wretched, wretched man!" he murmured. "Could human hatred seek such fiendish gratification?"

"Marry him to his own daughter!" muttered Kerly, angrily. "Wanted to marry him to his own daughter! It's well you've got that pistol-shot in your side; if you hadn't, I should be tempted to give it to ye, plum' centre!"

Bernard, though shocked, experienced a glow of hope and joy. The mysterious man, Whitelaw, was no longer his rival.

"Look at her! look at her!" said Ralph, with sudden energy. "Could ye not see her form and her beauty reproduced in that girl? Fool—blind fool! I drew her from the coppermine to cast her into a deeper pit—to let you drag her down, down, Edward!"

"Ah, ha!" interposed Owen. "He that runs beside me told me that Queen Nattie must not mate with the melancholy one. Owen's devil said: 'Down—down—down!' I put Tawny between them. I said: 'Let them cut you to pieces, Tawny, but never you move.'"

Nathalia had revived sufficiently to hear this. Whitelaw could no longer repress his emotions. He drew her to his breast in a paternal embrace. He shed sacred tears upon her head, and thanked God for their mutual escape. Tawny no longer stood between them.

"To you, Owen, to you, we owe everything!" cried Nathalia, in a transport of gratitude.

"Never you fear, Nattie!" answered Owen. "The whisperer says there'll be somebody that you can say 'Yes,' to. You'll have a subject, by-and-by, Queen Nattie, who'll be happy to kneel at your throne all day." Then to Tawny: "Never you go between 'em, Tawny!"

"This," said Father Brady, "is a most singular and startling development. Misdirected man, repent, repent!"

Ralph groped about wildly with his hands, and his breathing grew short.

"The hour has gone—has gone—has gone!" His hollow voice fell unpleasantly upon every ear. He paused a moment, then added, with less coherency:

"Don't betray the secret, Nattie. Swear—swear! Is it dark down in the pit? Is the water cold? I'll go down after you. Don't be afraid of uncle Ralph, child! Yes, Whitelaw may remain with you. Yes—yes—say yes! Silly creature—silly creature! If she knew what I know! But I'll tell them afterward; they shall know it when it's too late. Ah! that will brand them with shame and grief! They will fly from each other as if the angel of death had thrust himself between them. Ha, ha! Don't threaten me, Stratton; it has all fallen to the ground. Take her—take her! Be careful about that ladder. How it trembles! The lights have gone out. Bring out the miner's lamps. I'm cold—cold! Kindle a cheerful fire. I shiver—I stumble—who will lead me? Darker and darker! Down—down—the mine is very, very dark!"

"Yes," murmured Father Brady, "it is very dark!"

Ralph Quimby gasped convulsively, and the lamp of his life burned down to the socket and went out.

All present were awed and softened; they spoke in subdued voices, and looked wonderingly at each other.

"The wicked ones," said Owen, "will never trouble us any more!"

Kid Kerly and Bernard Ross scooped out two shallow graves down by the shore, and at midnight, the two miners were consigned to the earth, where love or hatred never agitate the human breast. When there is a storm on the lake, the waters dash over their graves.

Both Whitelaw and Nathalia now understood that attraction that had drawn them to each other; it was the soft voice of nature they had heard—the paternal and filial instincts. They comprehended the bond that had inspired mutual confidence and affection. When the first shock of surprise and terror had passed, they were happy in each other. Every hour new emotions of pleasure and gratitude swelled their hearts. Nathalia half forgot the misery of her young life. In the dear society of her father she no longer remembered the harshness of Ralph. It is true, that as often as she thought of his last infamous plot, she experienced a thrill of terror; but his memory, as his name, was ban-

ished as much as possible. Between father and daughter, he tacitly became a forbidden subject. After his burial, he was never referred to by either party when the hateful theme could possibly be avoided.

Several happy days were passed upon the island. Nathalia learned the nature of her feelings toward Bernard Ross. Established on a free and friendly footing, they soon became aware how much the happiness of one depended on the other. Whitelaw—we continue to call him thus—placed no unkind restrictions upon their intercourse, and their sentiments were not long in finding suitable expression. Nathalia's father gladly sanctioned their loves, and no one rejoiced in them more than Owen.

The gold-secret was duly discussed, and Bernard, Travis, and Kid Kerly, remained in that region until they had sufficiently enriched themselves with the gold dust.

Of Owen, nothing more was known; his birthplace and parentage were alike involved in uncertainty. He became a great favorite with Bernard and Whitelaw. He continued to pass the pleasant summer months upon his island, spending the more inclement seasons with Bernard and Nattie, in one of the border towns, where they settled after their marriage. His eccentricities never forsook him, and, if living, he still talks of his "whisperers," no doubt.

Kid Kerly, accompanied by Father Brady, returned to the mountains, leaving Tawny under the joint guardianship of Owen and Nathalia. Periodically he visited her, and beguiled many a winter evening by his tales of forest life.

Neil Travis and his wife, Mary, rejoined their friends in the settlements, and were not less happy for being wedded in a mine.

None of the parties will ever forget the miners of the lake shore; least of all, NATTIE OF THE WOODS. THE END.

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